From the self to the Self:

An exploration of the process of Self-realisation in the context of Indian psychology

A thesis in fulfilment of a Master of Philosophy

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The rishis and sages who continue to guide and support in the inner consciousness

Contents

Abstract 1

1. The Psychology of the Self: An introduction to Indian psychology 4

Introduction 4

Why research Indian psychology? 4

Prior methods used in research of IP 5

The importance of this study within a psychological context 6

The pursuit of happiness 7

The nature of the Self – a comparison between Western and Indian psychology 9

IP's contribution to a global psychology 10

The basis and scope of the study 10

Aims 12

Understanding Indian Psychology – The Voice of ancient wisdom defining Indian psychology 15

The living tradition 15

The ancient becomes modern: the emergence of Indian psychology 16

The Living Science: a viable academic scientific discipline? 18

The Problem of Consciousness: an unending search 18

The Primacy of the Self: Consciousness as the ultimate reality in IP 19

Understanding the 'self' in the context of Western psychology: self = ego? 21

Evolving perceptions of the 'self' 21

Bridging the Gap: IP's distinction from and contribution to Western psychological theory and practice 26

Personal Harmony and Global Survival: Exploring the relevance of IP in a modern world 26

One Self or many selves? 28

The Personal to the Transpersonal: the self to the Self 30

The value of spirituality in psychological health 32

Fostering the Heart: towards a spiritual psychology 33

The Cry from the Heart: the need for synthesis 37

Filling in the Gaps: IP's contribution 37

Alternative or Synthetic: What is it IP has to offer? 38

One Foundation for a Global Psychology: IP's potential in the current human condition 39

2 Ancient Indian Texts 41

Introduction 41

What are the *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad Gita*? 41

From the self to the Self: An exposition of Self-realisation based on the *Katha Upanishad* 42

A journey from the outer to the inner 43

The five-sheath model of human personality 44

Annamaya Kosha: The physical sheath 47

Pranamaya Kosha: The energetic sheath 48

Manomaya Kosha: The mental/emotional sheath 51

The choice of manomaya kosha 52

Vijnanamaya Kosha: The wisdom sheath 53

Anandamaya Kosha: the bliss sheath 54

Brahman 55

Transcending the personality 56

3 Methodological Approach: Bringing the Self to the field, creating the Self in the field . 60

Introduction: 60

Shining a Light on ancient methodologies: The ontological basis of investigation into Indian psychology 60

Interpretative research approach 62

Ethnographic context 63

Research design 68

The Hermeneutic Circle 69

The Hermeneutic Spiral 71

Analytic method 72

Thematic analysis and coding 72

Rigour and validity 75

Systematic study design 76

Establishing rapport 76

Variety of perspectives 76

Validation of emerging theories 76
Enhancing credibility of data 77
Strengths, challenges and weaknesses of the research design 82
Strengths 82
Challenges 83
Weaknesses 83
Research process 85
Criteria for participation 85
Contact and recruitment 87
The interview setting 88
Ethical considerations 88
4. Findings 90
Introduction 90
Relationship with participants as a cultural phenomenon 90
The emergent themes 91
Theme 1: There is a need for ego transcendence 92
Sub-theme: there is a need for dis-identification with the personalities and roles of the ego self 96
Sub-theme: I am not the doer 99
Theme 2: Desire and attachment are the root causes of unhappiness 102
Theme 3: Mental and emotional self-mastery are essential attributes 105
Theme 4: Character and values are the basis for spiritual life 108

The value of values 108

Sub-theme: Values are expressed as selflessness – an observed phenomenon 109

Sub-theme: The importance of selfless service 110

Theme 5: Spiritual practices are essential to the process of Self-realisation 111

The Four Yogas: Jnana, Bhakti, Karma and Raja 111

Theme 6: A teacher is necessary to the process 116

Sub-theme: The guru comes in different forms 116

Sub-theme: The outer guru leads to the inner guru 120

Theme 7: Realisation is constant integrated awareness 122

Mithya – the mirage, is it real? 122

Sub-theme: Attaining Self-realisation is difficult 122

Sub-theme: The Self is always there. 124

Sub-theme: Being, awareness and bliss (*Sat-chit-ananda*) are the nature of Self-realisation 125

Sub-Theme: Happiness is the expression of the true nature 126

Sub-theme: Transcendence is involved in universal identification (the non-dual state) 130

Sub-theme: Love is the essence of the spiritual process and the nature of the Self 131

Profile of the Realised person 132

5. Discussion 135

Introduction 135

Self-realisation as an evolutionary stage in psychological development 135

Transcendence as an applied psychology for ancient and modern times 138

Annamaya Kosha – the physical sheath 141

Pranamaya Kosh–a – the vital sheath 146

Manomaya Kosha – the mental/emotional sheath 148

Vijnanamaya Kosha – the higher mental (discriminating) sheath 152

Anandamaya Kosha – the blissful sheath 154

What value does this ancient science have for our knowledge, understanding and practice of psychology? 170

A Teacher is Necessary - Can the guru-disciple relationship translate to Western psychology? 173

The realised master and the guru-disciple relationship 173

Conclusion 177

Indian Psychology: An ancient paradigm for a new universal psychology? 177

Reference List 179

Index of Figures and Table

Fig. 1:	Aspects of the Self	45
Fig. 2:	The Chariot Model	49
Fig. 3:	Being and Becoming	53
Fig. 4:	The Upanishadic Map of Self-realisation	58
Fig. 5:	The Hermeneutic Circle	70
Fig. 6:	The Hermeneutic Spiral	71
Fig. 7:	The Psychology of Transcendence	137
Fig. 8:	The Origins of Distress	150
Table 1:	Interview Settings	88

Index of Appendices

Appendix 1	Participant Profiles	i
Appendix 2	Interview schedule	v
Appendix 3	Information sheet for participants	vii
Appendix 4	Statement of Consent	x
Appendix 5	Debriefing Statement	xii
Appendix 6	Glossary	xiii

Abstract

Introduction

The concept of 'self' has been explored through many different theoretical frameworks in both philosophy and psychology over the centuries. Indian psychology has based its concept of Self on an eternal 'beingness', beyond mind or intellect. This thesis explores the contribution such ideas could make to the development of a 'global psychology that, potentially could enhance the theoretical basis and provide effective solutions for many of the problems that beset modern humanity.

Background

The field of IP is a developing one and, as such, has provided very little empirical studies to support its claims. The discipline of psychology has attempted to explore the 'self' through various methods and understanding, some based on philosophical stances, others based on understanding of biology, in particular neurobiology, there is little consensus of what the 'self' or consciousness is, and how it interacts with the whole person. Indian psychology has approached this from a different stance, one that is rooted in the experiences and information supplied by ancient seers, who described the 'Self' as being greater than (and beyond) the realm of everyday experience.

Method

Three questions formed the core of this investigation: Is the process of Self-realisation (actualisation) still consistent with that described in the *Upanishads*?; What is the experience of practitioners?; What value does this ancient science have for our knowledge, understanding and practice of psychology?

I have attempted to answer these questions utilising a qualitative methodology, with an heuristic approach, in that I (as the investigator) have fully immersed myself in the world of

IP and the practitioners of Vedanta (the participants) who, effectively practice the fundamental principles in their daily lives. This is proffered as a research paradigm consistent with the principles and framework of IP. Questions were framed and semi-structured interviews were conducted. These were recorded,, then transcribed and thematic analysis was applied to the transcript, using coding, as well as utilising a hermeneutic approach that allowed for a more complete understanding to emerge. Some ethnographic observations have been integrated with the data to shed light on certain aspects of the participant's stories and views. This data was finally synthesised with a literature review of the Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita (two ancient Indian texts).

Findings

Seven core themes have been identified from the data. These are: there is a need for ego transcendence; desire and attachment are the root causes of unhappiness; mental and emotional self-mastery are essential attributes; character and values are the basis for spiritual life ; spiritual practices are essential to the process of Self-realisation; a teacher is necessity to the process; realisation is constant integrated awareness.

Discussion

This centred on the applicability of findings to the development of global psychology. This applicability potentially could be based on a model of Self-realisation that emerges from the synthesis of the findings with the ancient texts. The emergent model summarises the process as having five important components, related to the *koshas* (sheaths or levels of existence) whereby negative tendencies are transformed, through spiritual discipline, into positive life outcomes. This has the potential to free us from the 'existential prison' of the relative self or ego.

Conclusion

The study has successfully synthesised the body of evidence that addresses the core issues of psychology with spiritual understanding based in Vedanta and expressed in the emergent discipline of IP. The model developed from the findings shows potential to enable psychologists and psychotherapists to develop new approaches to many of the mental/emotional issues that affect modern human beings. In short, it has the potential to guide people towards happiness.

1. The Psychology of the Self: An introduction to Indian psychology

This thesis has arisen from a perceived need to extend what may be termed Western psychology (WP) into a more global application. Indian psychology (IP)[1] has been developed to create an indigenous psychological framework based on ancient teachings and understanding. This thesis utilises IP as a framework for the identification of areas in which ways of exploring the Self have been developed in ancient times, and how this may be applied to a modern (global) psychological setting.

Introduction

This first chapter investigates the value of researching the field of IP. It attempts to describe IP from ancient to modern times, elaborating on its important core – that of pure consciousness or 'Self'. This is then compared with the concept of 'self' in WP, enabling IP to be clearly distinguished to WP, and IPs current and potential contribution to trends in psychology to be identified. The value of spirituality (a significant aspect of IP) in relation to psychological health is also considered, drawing on research from both India and Western countries. The emerging science of IP is evaluated as a viable scientific discipline.

Why research Indian psychology?

Until recently, the study of consciousness (see page 19), in terms of an inward psychological process, has been approached from two seemingly opposite (and possibly incompatible) perspectives. It has been described in ancient Indian texts as the highest science (der von der Malsburg, 1997) indicating that there is value in investigating consciousness from an IP perspective. Prior to the last four decades, consciousness was viewed as outside the scope of psychological research (Kak, 1995). However, the recent advances in neurophysiology, modern physics and computer science have revealed that consciousness enters and affects the

[1] See Glossary for definitions of these terms

scientific process in the form of the observer effect (Ferretti & Musio, 1999; Kak, 1995; Scott, 1995). This indicates a more significant role for consciousness within scientific processes, suggesting that there is more to consciousness than a purely neurophysiological phenomenon. The possibility of an explanation being found in the ancient sciences of yoga and Vedanta has (in part) motivated this study, which is an exploration of the experiences of yoga and Vedanta practitioners in relationship to the ancient Indian texts.

Prior methods used in research of IP

While there is now a growing amount of literature on the nature of higher consciousness from both a Western scientific perspective (Tolman, 1927) and also that of modern research within Indian psychology (Rao, 2004; Rao, Paranjpe, & Dalal, 2008), there has been little consideration given to the process or the stages of growth in attaining such higher states of consciousness.

There has also been little attempt to incorporate the Indian concept of consciousness within a Western psychological framework. Sinha (1965) was one of the first researchers who related the concepts of IP to Western psychology, but apart from his work and the recent development of models from ancient texts (Bhawuk, 2008b) there is a paucity in the literature of empirical research into IP.

From an extensive investigation, only two empirical studies could be identified, both of which indicated the potential value of further research in this area. Naidu and Pande (1990) studied non-attachment (*anasakti)* in 465 Hindu adults. They found that those scoring high in non-attachment obtained lower scores in tests measuring stress and strain, indicating that non-attachment can reduce stress by eliminating negative emotions.

A study by Mohan (1999) found that spiritual experiences among respondents belonging to a wide variety of Hindu spiritual organizations were valuable and beneficial, and led to high levels of happiness and a sense of meaning and purpose.

In a review of a number of journals and books on the psychology of religion, apart from a body research on mindfulness meditation, no further empirical studies on IP were found. The search included IP publications, APA Psychnet, EBSCO, Science Direct and the Journal of Psychology of Religion and Spirituality. This deficit has led to suggestions that qualitative research, including methods such as narrative accounts, discourse and ethnographic analysis of IP, should be encouraged (Marsella, 1994).This suggestion is answered in this study through analysing the processes involved in the exploration of consciousness and Self-realisation and considering their potential value (for instance the study of happiness) within a global psychological context.

The importance of this study within a psychological context

The previously mentioned IP studies are consistent with investigation into what Maslow coined as 'peak experiences'. Wuthnow (1978) found that 'peakers' were more likely to value working for social change and helping to solve social problems, as well as serving those in need. He stressed the therapeutic value of these experiences and also the need to study their social significance. Five other studies have provided clinical evidence that peak experiences produce greater feelings of self-confidence, a deeper sense of meaning and purpose (Mogar, 1965; Savage, Fadiman, Mogar, & Allen, 1966; Watanabe, 2009), and lasting satisfaction in life (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999).

Such outcomes suggest the value of further investigating the process of gaining such experiences using other lenses, such as those used in other cultural/spiritual frameworks. It is significant that studies of mystical/spiritual experiences have consistently been found to correlate positively with life satisfaction and a deep sense of one's life purpose (Kass, Friedman, Lescrman, Zuttermeister, & Benson, 1991; Kennedy & Kanthamani, 1995;

Kennedy, Kanthamani, & Planner, 1994).This study has the potential to extend knowledge in this field, through the correlation of spiritual awakening and psychological states.

The life-changing outcomes of spiritual experiences assume even greater importance in human development. Fahlberg , Wolfer and Fahlberg (1992) interpreted personal crises from a developmental perspective that included the possibility of self-transcendence through spiritual experience. They suggested that health professionals, in their work in assisting the process of fostering happiness in patients, need to recognise, facilitate and support such experiences.

The pursuit of happiness

It could be argued that the universal human condition is the pursuit of happiness and that all of us consciously or unconsciously are motivated by the need for happiness. Varughese (2004) identifies the issue by explaining that we are motivated by outcomes of satisfaction, stating that we chase money, health, growth, fame, power, property and relationships, not for their own sake, but for the satisfaction they promise. These pursuits have become a focus for life in Western society (Lyubomirsky, 2008). However, research has found that the effect of material acquisitions on the level of happiness is fleeting (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999) compared to the intrinsic happiness of the Self, an observation that led to the development of the Hedonic Treadmill theory (Eysenck, 1990), which claims that having extra disposable income, a new car or home, or a holiday, creates only fleeting positive spikes emotionally. Over time, even more material possessions are required to achieve the same levels of (albeit fleeting) contentment, leading subjective well-being researchers to conclude that material wealth is not the most important factor in the attainment of happiness (Eid & Larsen, 2008). A focus on goals other than material wealth , has been found to be associated with happiness (Ryan & Deci, 2001). As a researcher and observer of the human condition, I have developed awareness of the folly of pursuing material gain instead of something deeper and more

meaningful. During annual trips to India, I began to notice a happiness exuding from the people, the holy men and women I met, and also simple peasants. This illustrates that material wealth is not essential for contentment. Although having little material comfort, they all appeared to live from an inner fullness and contentment, constantly expressed in selfless service. I also imbibed a personal inner happiness through spending time in their company. It seemed that spirituality (a core component of IP) contributed to more happiness than the materially rich lives of those in the West.

Studies of the Swaraj movement instigated by Gandhi (1938), as well as happiness levels among the homeless in India, would support this observation (Ben-Shahar, 2002). Diener and Biswas (2006) assessed the level of overall happiness and contentment of homeless people in Calcutta, and compared them with those in Fresco, California, and also in a housing society in Oregon. Using questionnaires that assessed both cognitive and affective measures, they found that the subjects from Calcutta scored significantly higher on overall happiness, as well as on satisfaction, than either of the materially better off US groups. While the subjects in both US groups scored significantly below neutral on the overall happiness scale, those in Calcutta scored significantly above neutral. Not only was the general life satisfaction among the Calcutta sample higher than that of the two American samples, but they judged their lives as actively positive, despite living on the streets with nothing and no possibilities.

This finding is consistent with other research (Begley, 2004). In a study of subjective well-being in 55 nations (Diener, Diener, & Diener, 1995), which utilised such measures as: material well-being; political and civil rights; income growth; social comparison; independence-interdependence; cultural homogeneity and equality, India had higher happiness levels than a number of countries with greater average income. Is it possible there is something about the inherent, innate and pervasive spirituality in India that leads its

citizens, even those living on the streets, to be happier than their counterparts in other countries?

A growing number of voices are emphasising the need to integrate indigenous wisdom in order to overcome many of the psychological issues that are increasing as a result of a Western materialistic outlook (Ashley, 2007; Bracho, 2006; Nerburn, 1999). IP brings to everyday life a sacred regard for the natural world and everything in it. It provides a pathway to deep communion with the sacredness in life which, in turn, leads to inner fullness and contentment (Saraswati, 2008).In this way, it appears to have the potential to provide an understanding of the growing psychological and social problems that are faced by many people globally (WHO, 2013) and make a significant contribution to their solution.
This approach considers the human condition through a focus on the universal Self, and presenting individuals and populations with a variety of time-tested methods for attaining a personal fulfilment that is markedly different from that propounded by Western psychology.

The nature of the Self – a comparison between Western and Indian psychology

There are fundamental differences between the perspectives on the nature of the Self between Western and Indian psychology. In their introduction to *The Book of the Self*, Young-Eisendrath and Hall (1987) speak of the lack of consensus about the nature of the Self in Western psychology:

> *"The inter-subjective reality of the self is the least consensual, the least accessible to shared construction; yet it is the tacit background and fundamental ground for all theorizing we do … Even simple descriptions of 'what it means to be a person' are likely to contradict one another and to vary considerably."* (p. 1)

This is consistent with a number of other authors including Mansfield (2000) and also Mitchell (1993, p. 99) who sees the Self as a "*central and most important concept*" that has

led to the development of psychoanalytic theory, but one that has "*enormous variability*" and little agreement among theorists and practitioners.

It would seem that IP, with its ability to embrace an understanding of multiple aspects of the self within the context of the One Self, may have an important contribution to the understanding of the nature of pure consciousness, termed the Self in IP.

IP's contribution to a global psychology

IP has the potential to bring a different voice to psychological theory. Its strength is exemplified in the following statement of Rao (2008a, pp. 1-18): *"Indian psychology, like psychoanalysis and unlike cross-cultural psychology, is a psychological thought system with significant implications for future psychological research in India and elsewhere."* It is proposed that this study will provide a beginning, in that it documents dialogues with the practitioners who have applied the philosophies to their own lives, and it documents the results of that application.

Several authors have discussed the value that IP could bring to psychology in general (Cornelissen, 2010; Koenig, 1998; Marsella, 1994; Menon, 2005b). Their assumptions are based on the value that is placed on IP, largely through an adherence to its inherent philosophical basis. Whilst the potential for transformation of current psychological thought and practice could be argued, there is scant information about the effect of the practices on the lives of the practitioners. This study seeks to address the evidence gap in the current literature on IP, albeit in a small way. It has the potential to contribute significantly to the theoretical and practical basis of IP.

The basis and scope of the study

In *The Handbook of Indian Psychology*, which brings together the work of eminent IP psychologists, it is evident that current knowledge of IP is mainly limited to the theoretical domain (Rao & Marwaha, 2005; Rao, Paranjpe, & Dalal, 2008).This is also evident in the

collection of papers from conferences on IP (Rao & Marwaha, 2005). In order to generate some empirical data, three questions formed the core of this investigation:

- Is the process of Self-realisation (actualisation) still consistent with that described in the *Upanishads (see glossary)*
- What is the experience of practitioners?
- What value does this ancient science have for our knowledge, understanding and practice of psychology?
- Within these core questions, this research focused on the PROCESS and EXPERIENCE of Self-realisation. Sub-questions included: What are the most significant steps on the pathway to Self-realisation?
- Is there a natural progression?
- What are the most significant challenges that confront the practitioner?
- What methods are used to overcome these challenges?
- How are the principles and values of IP integrated into the lives of practitioners?
- How does this pathway affect the orientation toward the mind, body and emotions?
- What is the effect on the quality of life of practitioners, both individually and socially?

Major themes arising from the interviews are contrasted with those found in the *Upanishad*s, and provide a map of Self-realisation (see Fig. 4) which can be assessed for its relevance to human potential and well-being. This study includes both Western and Eastern seekers, as

well as long-term practitioners of yoga[2] and Vedanta[3] with high standing in Indian society, across a range of different lineages (traditions). See Appendix A.

Aims

I would argue that this study suggests a potential way forward for psychology as a whole; however, it utilises a largely Indian cultural context in which the significance of its findings will be determined. This could be seen as a limitation, but this approach ensures that any results and, by inference, conclusions are understood in light of that context, avoiding conclusions about the generalisability of IP to psychological thought and practice that have been made (Rao, 2008a). This limitation is mitigated to some extent by the fact that the study encapsulates both Western and Eastern perspectives, with the inclusion of Westerners as well as Indian practitioners. Where discussing the results in light of current trends in psychology is considered useful and valuable, this is identified.

For example, Indian psychology has the potential to contribute to the growing discussion and debate on the relevance of Maslow's (1971) theory of self-actualisation and its place in the hierarchy of needs (Kumar, 2008). Kenrick et al (2010) have linked these needs to evolutionary adaptations and motivational mechanisms. This is particularly interesting in the light of the revolutionary concepts some participants had as a result of their own experiences. Kesebir, Graham and Oishi (2010), whilst concurring with the ideas presented by Kenrick, also argue for 'cultural variations' a stance that goes beyond mere biology into a social psychological approach This view is supported by Smith, Spillane and Annus (2006), who indicate that the development of a 'universal psychology' denies the influence of culture, and that there needs to be a universal culturally-specific model.

[2] Deriving from *Yug* meaning to yoke, yoga refers to the discipline of aligning the mind and body with spiritual goals.

[3] Vedanta – literally, the end of Veda, meaning the culmination of Vedic thought and philosophy. The online Sanskrit dictionary describes it as "Vedic method of Self-realisation"

IP could be considered such a model, emerging as it does from the culture of the Indian sub-continent, with its specific characteristics (namely the intertwining of the spiritual/religious with everyday life) and its more universal approach, which explores facets common to all humanity (Rao, 2008a).

The study includes practices that have been identified as having value in IP. These are classified under the headings *jnana*, *bhakti*, *karma* and *raja* yoga. *Jnana* yoga can be translated as the development of wisdom, dispassion and discrimination. *Bhakti* yoga encompasses the devotional practices that open the heart to compassion (Swami Vivekananda, 1896/1984). *Karma* yoga is the activity of selfless service and of contributing to society (Swami Vivekananda, 1896/1984; Swamy, Nagendra, Heisnam, & Devi, 2003). *Raja* yoga has a core focus on meditation (Feurnstein, 2008). The study has the potential to extend the current theoretical research on IP by providing some empirical understanding of these practices and linking them to psychological processes.

By incorporating the spiritual dimensions of self-actualisation recognised and described in IP (Kumar, 2008), this research has potential to broaden our understanding of cross-cultural psychology and contribute to finding potential solutions to many problems facing the world today. This acknowledges the central importance that IP places on spirituality.

The experiences of participants present a case for the importance of a deep spiritual connection in attaining psychological health and well-being,. The rates of mental illness have increased sharply (Satcher, 1999) and the top ten medicines prescribed in America are not those which treat infections, fevers or even heart/organ disease, but those that treat anxiety, depression and sleeplessness (Saraswati, 2008).. The WHO has identified that depression affects three hundred and fifty million people worldwide (2013). New Zealand has one of the highest prevalence in the world of anxiety, mood and substance abuse disorders, with twenty per cent of the population suffering a mental disorder, and thirty seven per cent of those

suffering more than one (Mental Health Foundation, 2013). This study presents a strong case for the urgent need to bring spirituality back into psychological theory and practice. The findings also demonstrate the necessity for an adequate philosophy of life in creating psychological health.

This study has the potential to increase understanding that is vital for building effective multi-cultural counselling bridges. It may also provide an Eastern perspective for transcending the boundaries of current practices and an orientation for providing services which are more relevant to many of those in our multi-cultural societies who either originate from within Eastern cultures or who ascribe to those philosophies. Rao (2004) is clear that many current approaches have failed to deal with some important aspects of human nature that appear to be simply beyond their scope. This view is supported by a growing number of Western psychologists (Levenson, Aldwin, & Cupertino, 2012; Priddy, 1999; Summers, 1999; Whitfield, 2009), as well as by the emergent but comprehensive research recently conducted on the problems of egocentrism and ways of it being transcended. (Wayment & Bauer, 2012).

Menon (2005a, pp. 83-98) argues that Indian psychology has expanded the conventional definition of psychology from a 'science of behaviour', to a way of charting and contributing to 'human possibility and progress.' The Pondicherry Manifesto states: *"Indian psychology is rich in content, sophisticated in its method and valuable in its applied aspects. It is pregnant with possibilities for the birth of new models in psychology that would have relevance not only for India but also for psychology in general.*" (Anonymous, 2002)Paranjpe and Rao (2008) relate consciousness and self (as described at the core of *Advaita Vedanta*) to current psychological issues of concern, and argue that their influence is potentially significant. Cornelissen (2008a) also pleads for their legitimate place in science, because he believes a correct understanding of it (IP)*"may be crucial for our collective development if not survival*." (pp. 414-428)

The growing voice from these modern pioneers in IP, the results of this study, and the more recent calls in Western psychology for a paradigm which values ego transcendence, indicate a convergence of East and West in this regard. Recognition of this context is needed if psychology is to be equipped to meet the challenges of the times. The voices of the participants not only echo the ancient scriptures of India, but also the voices of a growing number of Western psychologists, yet they add an intimacy of experience that has so far been unheard. This indicates the need to more deeply understand the nature of IP.

Understanding Indian Psychology – The Voice of ancient wisdom defining Indian psychology

IP is a core discipline that has developed from Indian philosophical approaches to psychological theory and its potential application (Rao & Marwaha, 2005). As such, its scope is as broad as the philosophical approaches found in Vedanta, which are multiple and varied. These approaches are exemplified in the first core text that has emerged from this fledgling science (Rao, Paranjpe, & Dalal, 2008), clearly linking IP with the various streams of Indian thought, each one containing multiple perspectives on the nature of the human personality. IP refers to these traditional perspectives from an ontological and epistemological understanding and this forms the framework for potential methods of exploring these multiple dimensions.

In short, IP has been developed with reference to the distinctive systems of thought that were developed from the very beginning of Indian civilization, the core of which has remained until the present time.

The living tradition

IP is part of a living tradition, which has survived many challenges over thousands of years. It promotes freedom of thought and practice, embracing a multiplicity of diverse schools. Although it originated in the Indian sub-continent, it has spread throughout many parts of

Asia, embracing paths as diverse as Vedanta[4], Buddhism[5], Jainism[6], Sufism[7] and Samkhya Yoga[8] (Frawley, 2003)It is concerned with the human condition, namely: bondage to desire; suffering because of such bondage; and the path to freedom from such attachment (Swami Nikhilanada, 1951).

With its roots in the ideas, concepts and visions encapsulated in the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*, IP considers the multi-faceted universe as evolving out of One Consciousness. Therefore it emphasises unity within diversity, positing no contradiction between the seeming polar opposites of which creation is comprised. This has enabled IP to accommodate a multitude of paths and practices which, although seemingly contradictory, have their part in the whole (Frawley, 2003).

Founded on the basic premise that the essential nature of one's being is Consciousness or a transcendental Self, it postulates that this same Consciousness underlies everything in the universe (Rao, 2005a; Swami Nikhilanada, 1951). IP attempts to map the paths by which this can be experienced as an essential realisation. The personal, interpersonal and societal levels of human functioning are encapsulated within this context. Rather than viewing the individual as the centre of reality, IP emphasises an inclusive notion of 'field' where the 'field' and the 'knower of the field' are not mutually exclusive (Dalal & Misra, 2005; Rao, 2005)

The ancient becomes modern: the emergence of Indian psychology

The emergence of IP in modern times can be traced to the works of Vivekananda (1896/1984), Ramana Maharshi (1997), Aurobindo (1972), Swami Rama (1998), and Sathya

4 The culmination of the Vedas – a collection of scriptures primarily focused on advaita (non-dualism)
5 The religion that follows the teaching of Gautama Buddha (a teacher who lived around the 5th century BCE)
6 The religion that arose from the teachings of Mahavira (around 6th century BCE) based around ahimsa (non-violence)
7 The inner, mystical dimension of Islam
8 One of the six orthodox philosophical systems of Hinduism that is more dualistic

Sai Baba (1996-2009), who have played a role in popularising '*sanathana dharma*[9] worldwide. This is now also growing in popularity within academic psychology. In recent times an increasing number of publications and conferences have given it impetus as a vibrant science (Dalal & Misra, 2010).

Over the last 100 years, academic psychology in India has been dominated by the modern scientific approach (see Glossary). However, there is an increasing awareness that the key concepts and models in psychological studies and practices that have been taken from a Western psychological perspective are simply not appropriate in an Indian culture (Dalal, 2010). For the last forty years there has been a call to indigenise the prevailing Western discipline. Sinha (1981) has consistently argued that psychology in India must be culturally sensitive, and he calls for the integration of modern psychology with Indian thought. There have been an increasing number of publications urging psychologists in India to make their practices more relevant within the Indian context. Efforts to integrate traditional Indian concepts and theories within a broader global perspective have recently intensified (Bhawuk, 2011; Marsella, 1994; Rao & Marwaha, 2005; Saraswati, 2002).

Recognition of this newly emerging science (IP) requires a paradigm shift within the profession of psychology. Bhawuk (2010b) has recognised the importance of the development of an epistemology and ontology derived from the *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad Gita*[10] to address ontological questions relating to the fundamental nature of being - a call that is, in part, answered by this study. His presentation of a concept of Self has clear implications for global psychology (Bhawuk, 2005). He also demonstrated the value of building models from the scriptures, identifying them as useful tools that can provide templates which bridge psychology, philosophy and spirituality (Bhawuk, 2005, 2010a; 1999b). Rao (2008b) identifies IP as an emergent and important holistic science, including all

[9] The eternal wisdom or path laid down by the Vedas and Vedanta
[10] The ancient textual foundations of IP

multiple aspects (the unity in diversity concept) and constituting a comprehensive and practical knowledge (or wisdom) about the nature of human existence.

The Living Science: a viable academic scientific discipline?

Indian psychology appears to be growing in popularity among academic psychologists as indicated by the growing number of published papers and conferences (Dalal & Misra, 2010). Bhawuk (2005) and Kumar (2008) describe IP as a multi-layered science, comprising the investigation of a subtle inner, a physical and a social being. This living science grew out of a tradition of critical examination, where scholars and sages continuously formulated, analysed, interpreted, refined and transmitted knowledge to worthy disciples.

Dalal and Misra (2010a) also see IP as an applied and practical science, leading to testable hypotheses and experimentation aiming at inner transformation. A number of personal transformative techniques such as meditation, central to IP, have now been subjected to serious scientific scrutiny, primarily through mindfulness research (Ballentine, Swami Ajaya, & Swami Rama, 1976; Engler, 1984; Wallace, 1979). Indian psychology is also increasingly seen as a viable academic discipline. Dalal and Misra (2010a, pp. 121-155) state:*"... appropriately studied and judiciously pursued, with deep scholarship and due methodological rigor and discipline, IP has the potential to be the forerunner of future psychology."*

However, the question remains as to how IP views and studies the central question of *consciousness*.

The Problem of Consciousness: an unending search

Consciousness is seen as the primary reality and core concept of IP. In the newly-developing field of 'consciousness studies' there is little consensus on what consciousness is or does (Chalmers, 1995; Combs, 2010). In the book "Explaining Consciousness - the Hard Problem", David Chalmers (1997) identifies the 'problem of consciousness' as being resistant

to scientific theory. Little has changed in the last sixteen years. Combs (2010) proffers the argument that empiricism may be inadequate to explain its mystery, but that the exploration is driven by our relentless search for meaning in life. The doctrines of non-material consciousness and 'free will' (implying indeterminism and choices based on conscious volition) identify theories of consciousness that lie outside of the scope of a consciousness based in neurobiology (Dulany, 2003). The work of Hobbes (1946) and Skinner (Naour, 2009) placed consciousness as a function of neurobiology (behaviourism). Such behaviourist thinking has now been incorporated into general scientific approaches to mind and consciousness (Harzem, 2004). Vedic science, on which IP is based, is more concerned with consciousness as a *"silent, unbounded state", where there is no spatial or temporal awareness*" (Travis, Munly, Olson, & Sorfiaten, 2005, pp. 123-135). Thus the understanding of consciousness shifts into something that is totally non-material, outside the boundaries of matter (compared to the matter-bound theories of behaviourism).

In fact, consciousness in IP can be related to the Self, which is central to the understanding of the deeper conceptual framework and the potential application of IP.

The Primacy of the Self: Consciousness as the ultimate reality in IP

The Indian tradition presents a way of understanding consciousness which resolves such differences between viewpoints. It presumes that the underlying structure of reality is essentially hierarchical. The upper range of this hierarchy is the pure, eternal consciousness of the Self, which is unaffected by the birth and death of the body and mind *Bhagavad Gita* ii.xiii-20 (Swami Chidbhavananda, 1982). All else is a partial manifestation of this reality, a level of evolving consciousness. This implies that consciousness is seen as an ontological truth rather than a psychological function, and is related not to the ego, but to the core identity. The human is seen, first and foremost, as a conscious Self, which is at one with the Absolute (*Brahman*).

According to the contemplative traditions of both East and West, our usual waking state is distorted and deluded, a partial reality which IP terms *maya* or illusion. In the West this has been called a shared dream or collective psychosis (Walsh, 2007). Those who have woken from this illusion become aware that their true nature is not separate from anything or anyone (Watts, 1961). They realise that one's real, most authentic Self pervades the universe and all other beings. This is the consciousness referred to in IP studies (Rao, Paranjpe, & Dalal, 2008).

Unlike WP, mind and consciousness in IP are considered to be qualitatively different. The mind is considered the interface between consciousness and body. When the mind connects with the external world through the senses, there is phenomenal awareness; when it connects to consciousness, there is transcendental awareness (Menon, 2008).

Cornelissen (2008a, p. 427) suggests *"our concept of consciousness is closely related to what we think about our identity, and that again has a profound influence on what we do, become and dare to aspire for."* If WP can enlarge its view of consciousness to align itself more closely with the fuller manifestation described in IP, he believes it will provide an enhanced pathway for reaching human potential.

Recent research in cognitive neuroscience has brought about not only a change in the conception of psychology, but also a multi-disciplinary approach to understanding the mind. This involves philosophy, anthropology, linguistics, computer science and neuroscience (Dennett, 1992; Gardner, 1987). Indian psychology with its Vedantic approach has much to help augment these developments, as it encompasses the deeper aspects of the Self.

Understanding the 'self' in the context of Western psychology: self = ego?

Evolving perceptions of the 'self'

Whilst there is no common framework for understanding the Self in WP, generally the self is perceived as an enduring entity (Descartes, 1985; Freud, 1923; Wayment & Bauer, 2012) . However, some deny the existence of self. Influential people such as Skinner (2002) have rejected the concept, whereas others such as Kant (2003), Piaget (1950), and Erikson (1950) have affirmed it. Several modern psychological theories argue for the multiplicity of the self, however this is also seen in the context of an enduring unity of self – the 'dialogical' self (Hermans, 2001; Salgado & Hermans, 2005) .

Commonly, a strong ego is affirmed as a key to success in work, interpersonal relationships and life in general (Hartmann, 1939; Mammons & Stinnett, 1980; Rangoon, Bashoo, & Patel, 2006). In such a context, the ego is strengthened in therapy and low self-esteem is corrected. It is the rare Western theorist, such as Jacques Lacan (Parker, 2010), who has conversely suggested that it is precisely a strong ego, or rather the illusion of a strong ego, that causes suffering.

The nature of the self has been a topic of serious enquiry since ancient times (Pourgolafshan, 2011; Swami Nikhilanada, 2008) . Many psychologists have contributed a steady stream of publications around the self. For example, it has been conceptualized in a variety of ways by

European and American theorists. The term 'self' has been used in reference to a basis for social interaction (Adler, 1925); an unconscious archetype (Jung, 1958); a personal construct (Kelly, 1963); and for the organization of perceptions (Combs & Snygg, 1959). Freud's (1923) association of the system 'ego' with the organization and direction of impulses and drives has had a wide impact on Western culture.

Models of the self that have been influenced by Freud's concept of an energy-directing system within the person include a number of prominent theorists. Erikson(1959) saw ego-identity crises as the focal point for each stage of human development. Berne (1977) mapped interpersonal relationships on the basis of ego states, Hartmann (1964) developed ego psychology, and Kohut (1971) argued that what made therapy work was more about the therapist addressing the patient's sense of self than about their analytic ability. In most traditions, either a cohesive ego self or a multiple/decentred version of self is emphasised (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). While most of these investigations centred on the self as a synonym for the ego sense, the Self in Vedantic thought is considered to be beyond the ego, a difference that has yet to be fully accepted and appreciated in WP.

Self and identity continue to be a topic of active research (Paranjpe, 1998). A number of theoretical frameworks of the self have been explored. These include *self-esteem* (Clayson & Frost, 1984; Zantra, Guenther, & Chartier, 1985); *self-efficacy* (Bandura, 1989); *self-actualization* (Elizabeth, 1983); and *self-realization* (Symonds, 1980). Gergen (1994) has also explored the relational view of self, and discussed the concept of 'saturated self' arising from the dilemmas of identity in an increasingly complex world. Similarly, Markus and Kitayama's (1991) theory of self-concept development focuses on the interdependent, context-based self, which is influenced to a large degree by the surrounding culture..

On the assumption of cultural differences between Western and Eastern civilisations, research by Chiu and Hong (2006), Heine (2001) and Lehman, Chiu and Schaller (2004) have focused

on differences between basic self-processes. Yet other research defends the universal nature of such self-processes (Sedikuder, Gaertner, & Toguchi, 2003; Sedikuder, Gaertner, & Vevea, 2005) .

These investigations have been primarily centred on the relationship between the self and the external world. Again, there is a fundamental difference between the Western view of the self and the view that is propounded in IP, which is primarily of a Self beyond the grasp of the mind. Self continues to be a viable construct in psychology, judging from the amount of continuing research and theory devoted to defining and exploring its nature.

From a Western perspective, the self is, perhaps, an indispensable concept for explaining how people organize perception, encounter the world of experience and maintain a cohesive image of identity. From the perspective of IP, the Self is beyond this phenomenal world – an experience of pure being.

'Self-psychology' is a framework for psychotherapy, based on the construct of self which is largely attributable to Kohut (1971), which has profoundly influenced psychoanalytic theory and practice (Tobin, 1990). Kohut's view of the self owed a debt to Freud's (1923) view of the ego. He described the self as being formed of images and representations that were affected by conscious and unconscious thoughts and experiences. The Freudian concepts of transference, and developmental fixation and regression were thought to play an important role in the self and in the pathologies of the self. Kohut diverged from Freud because of his belief that the self was not based on instinctual biological drives, but was constructed through internalizations of empathic experiences. This consideration made Kohut's approach more phenomenological and therefore closer to IP.

The image of self, that the person constructed, was thought by Kohut (1971) to be the product of internalizations of experiences of connectedness with others. Initially, most children

depend largely on their mother for the experiences of empathic connection that allow the self to develop. Merging with, mirroring received from, and idealizing of the parent are considered to be steps that allow the construct of the self to be developed. Kohut and Wolf (1978) describe the three major constituents of a cohesive self as (a) the struggle for success and power, (b) established ideals and goals, and (c) an area of talents and skills that are activated by the tension between ambitions and ideals. The person who has established a cohesive self is also able to productively use narcissistic energy, believe in and care about self, and enjoy the awareness of itself.

Although Kohut described the self as able to unify perceptions, this was less central to his theory than was the development of the self-construct through internalization of experiences with, and images of, others.

IP takes on a different perspective altogether, in that it refutes the concept of the ego-bound personality being real, rather a principle of limitation and separateness. However, both traditions can be seen to address different levels of the consciousness issue, and there is some concordance in that a loss of consciousness is viewed as a major factor in suffering.

Several theorists have emphasised the unification of perceptions as central to the nature of self. For Combs and Snygg (1959) , the organization of the perceptual field around a self-concept (also called the phenomenal self) is essential to developing personal adequacy, coping skills, and abilities for need satisfaction. The phenomenal self is described as an organisation of perceptions around core concepts that are developed as constancies, anchorages, and symbolizations of predictable events. Experiences, as well as culturally-transmitted meanings, are portrayed as important factors in the development of the self-concept. Combs, Avila and Purkey (1971) view the self-concept, the idea of who we are, as the most important single factor affecting human behaviour.

Gestalt therapy, as formulated by Perls, Hefferline and Goodman (1951), also places an emphasis on the unified perceptual configurations (*gestalten*) that create meaning within experience. The self was described by these authors as a system of current contacts that organized themselves around the creation and maintenance of figure and ground *gestalten* within the organism and the environment field. This system is not viewed as static, but as an ongoing process that always occurs at the contact boundary where organism and perceived environment meet. Disturbances in the self are considered to be related to attempts to avoid or prevent contact. This avoidance and the distortion of the perception of contact are often related to past situations that are not yet perceptually completed by the person. The self is viewed as creative and able to release anxiety and energy as it reintegrates with the environment in a current act of new meaning formation and adjustment. The self that is functioning adaptively is able to resolve splits in awareness, such as mind and body, subject and object, and consciousness and unconsciousness. The self is potentially a total movement of organism and environment interaction and integration.

Perls' (1973) later work emphasised the importance of awareness and led to his conclusion that "*awareness, contact, and present are merely different aspects of one and the same process - self- realisation.*" (p. 66) According to Jacobs (1989), recent developments in gestalt theory focus around understanding the dialogic aspects of the self as it contacts the environment, especially as this contact allows the emergence of an 'I — Thou' dialogue and mutual acceptance. In Gestalt Therapy we see a deeper integration of non-dual themes as encapsulated in Perls' (1992) directive *"Lose your mind and come to your senses."*. Human beings are seen to be engaged in an evolutionary process to access a deeper consciousness.

Rogers' (1961) person-centred approach to counselling has certain similarities to gestalt therapy. Meador and Rogers (1984) clearly describe the importance of awareness within experience, and of clearly formulated perception, to the therapeutic process. Optimum

growth occurs when there is no distance, separation or incongruence between the self and current experience (Rogers, 1980). In Rogerian Therapy, clients are encouraged to achieve a sense of inner harmony by integrating all aspects of the inner self.

The key difference between such approaches in Western psychology and IP is how the nature of the human being is understood. While Rogers and Perls did emphasise the value of accessing deeper levels of consciousness in the journey towards wholeness, and acknowledged the healing virtue of embracing something close to the IP concept of non-dual awareness, they stopped short of seeing the full significance of its relevance and practical and theoretical implications for psychotherapy.

Bridging the Gap: IP's distinction from and contribution to Western psychological theory and practice

Personal Harmony and Global Survival: Exploring the relevance of IP in a modern world

An increasing number of researchers are recognising that there are concepts in Indian thought which have had a significant role in the development of psychology. Walsh (1988) and Miovic (2008) take key concepts from IP, focused around the therapist reaching into the depth of the spiritual nature (as compared to merely the mental/emotional state) and believe they demonstrate the relevance of IP for psychotherapeutic techniques. Jha (2008) purports that a close scrutiny and critical evaluation of the IP concept of personality provides a sound alternative paradigm to the existing theories of personality. This is consistent with concepts found in the *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad Gita*, which describe the personality within a multilevel framework.

This study reflects this emergent idea within psychology and psychotherapy. Anand (2004) and Paranjpe (2009) argue for the relevance of emerging IP perspectives on pain and suffering, Dalal and Misra (2010a) Bhawuk (1999b) and Kumar (2004) present IP perspectives on personal harmony, peace and well-being as being essential for the survival of the global community with its increasing stress levels. Bhawuk (2008a) has also given cognition, emotion and behaviour a new significance by anchoring them in the IP concept of desire.

While modern proponents of IP believe it has the potential to make an important contribution to a global psychology, for this to occur it is important to once again make the distinction between the concepts presented in IP and the conceptual framework of mainstream WP thought, and to also consider the growing integration of Eastern thought in modern-day transpersonal psychology.

Whilst psychological theory has developed considerably, it is in the field of consciousness that IP could potentially make a significant contribution. The restrictive assumptions of a bio-centric bias, primarily founded on a behaviourist approach (Harzem, 2004; Watson, 1913) could be seen as the antithesis of IP. This is because of its focus on the physiological basis of consciousness. Although the cognitive (Baars, 1988) and neuroscience (Walach, Schmidt, & Jonas, 2011) approaches which followed acknowledged consciousness, they left the phenomenological aspects little touched, by locating consciousness in the brain. Although parapsychology purports that consciousness is not limited to the brain (Tart, 1997), it fails to encompass the deeper aspects of Self that are central to Vedanta.

In recent years there has been a tendency in social psychology to focus on the 'self' in a way that could be termed 'self-centred' (Baumerster, Vohs, & Tunder, 2011). In spite of changing attitudes towards consciousness in psychology, partly as a result of advances in cognitive neuroscience, it is generally interpreted in a totally different manner to that found in IP.

Consciousness, as defined in mainstream psychology, generally relies upon physiological explanations, whereas in IP it is seen as originating from a deeper source than merely physiological.

It is useful to look in more depth at the differing concepts of 'self', as this is where the greatest distinctions between Eastern and Western psychological thought lie. However, there is, paradoxically, also some concordance between IP and the Western model in regard to this concept.

One Self or many selves?

As illustrated in the previous section, WP has developed an elaborate theory of personal constructs (Steel, 1988). The brief review of conceptual frameworks around the idea of 'self' in Western psychology reveals that the concept of multiple 'selves' has been theorised and tested in practice over a number of years. One major idea that has emerged is the relationship between the 'personal self' and the 'social self', which have been seen as similar but different at the same time (Brewer, 1991; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Out of this idea arose the self-categorization theory (Turner & Oakes, 1986). This paradox is familiar to IP, and is explored in this study as participants' experiences are investigated, elaborating on the concept of multiple 'selves' in the context of the body sheaths as discussed in the *Upanishads* and also in relationship to participants' experience of the one 'Self', which James Hillman termed 'soul' (Elkins, 1995).

Whilst IP recognises a unitary whole termed the Self, Western science has tended to look at the self through a reductionist process of examining the parts, without substantive integration back into a greater whole. Taking the stance that is commonly utilised in cognitive neuroscience, the brain has been divided into functional areas (Fossati et al., 2003).This view has significantly shaped modern psychology in such areas as cognitive behaviour therapy (Cacioppo et al., 2003). However, there is an emergent view that the brain does not function

in this manner entirely, but has a unitary wholeness (Cacioppo, et al., 2003; Gordon, 2003) indicating the need for further investigation of the importance of this finding to psychological theory and practice. In the light of this discovery, it is useful to consider that IP could add another dimension, which is a spiritual one. This spiritual view has not entirely been ignored by the Western model. At the end of the nineteenth century William James (1902) became known for investigating different forms of spiritual experience. A hallmark of Allport's work is the psychology or religion (Fuller, 2008), and there is currently the emergence of neurotheology as a discipline (Newburg, 2010). However the voice of the spiritual dimensions that relate to the IP Self, have been muted (Dennis, 1995).

The Western theories of selfhood that discuss the importance of a cohesive and well-constructed self, as in Kohut (1971), or that describe the necessary centrality of one's self-concept, as in Combs and Snygg (1959), are approaching human problems from a different perspective than that found in IP. The experiences described in IP contradict the centrality and cohesion of such a self. The perpetuation of past habits and conditioning, the clinging to a false sense of substantiality, and the division of experience into what is 'acceptable' and what is 'unacceptable' maintain our belief in the necessity of our self-centred views of reality. What IP potentially can offer to this is an integrated perspective, which includes dimensions largely unexplored in WP, such as the role of the *buddhi*[11] in being the 'voice' of the *atman* (soul) or conscience. This is seen as the outward expression of the deepest consciousness (Swami Nikhilanada, 2008).

Some attempts at exploring this integrated nature of the self include Gestalt therapy (Perls, 1992), with its concern on resolving and completing "unfinished business" that is carried from the past, and Rogers (1980) person-centred theory, with its focus on the non-separation of self and experience, decidedly have some congruence with the IP view of self.

[11] Intelligence or discriminative faculty

Watts (1961) noted that Western and Eastern psychology have a mutual concern with liberating human beings from self-contradiction in thinking, feeling, experiencing and acting. He points out that IP presents a relatively-accessible model for Westerners, because the Indian interest in the nature and function of the self is similar to the concerns of some influential Western theorists and practitioners.

Early key figures in Western psychology, such as Horney (1942), James, Rank, Adler and Fromm (Epstein, 2004; Suzuki, 1996) saw the psychological potential of Eastern psychology and its therapeutic promise for the West. Jung (Jung & Shamdasani, 1966) published several essays on aspects of IP. He drew from them his understanding of the psyche, especially the Self within the individuation process, acknowledging the spiritual aspects that gave a more complete picture of human nature. It is possible to establish a link between IP and Maslow's (1971) theory of self-actualisation and transcendental self-actualisation through the concepts of progression from the gross to subtle, found in the Upanshadic descriptions of the Koshas (sheaths) (Swami Nikhilanada, 2008).

The Personal to the Transpersonal: the self to the Self

A strand of transpersonal psychology has been significantly informed by IP teachings (Almas, 1996; Assagioli, 1971; Grof, 1985, 1988; Hixon, 1978; Maslow, 1968; Walsh & Vaughan, 1993; Wilbur, 1977, 1986, 2006). Inspired by Eastern mysticism and esotericism, Assagioli (1971) tried to show that human potential also holds a possibility for experiences with spiritual and transpersonal dimensions. He attempted to create a psychology which synthesized Eastern mysticism and philosophy and Western psychoanalysis and logic. His concept of Self highly resembles the IP description of 'Atman'. To Assagioli, the Self is a nucleus of consciousness and will, which is not synonymous with the body, emotions or thoughts. He identifies Self-realisation as an evolution of consciousness, where still higher expansions of consciousness lead to a unification with the universal Self.

Almas (1996) worked with various Eastern teachers and developed his psychotherapeutic approach as an articulation of the terrain of his actual personal process of transformation, rather than from an intellectual synthesis. He states that, in Self-realisation, the consciousness of the individual self does not die away or get discarded, but becomes clarified and integrated. This integration is the process through which the absolute manifests as an individual who embodies the ultimate truth in a personal life in the world.

Wilber (2006) has devoted himself to integrating Eastern and Western philosophical systems. In constructing his map of psycho-spiritual development, he uses exclusively material from ancient spiritual literature, primarily the *Vedanta*. He demonstrates that the descriptions in ancient spiritual sources are still, to a great extent, relevant for modern humanity. He sees the ego self as necessary to orient us to the physical world, the soul as the self-system that operates at the level of subtle reality, and the witness (or Self) as adapted to the causal realm. According to Wilber, these streams of self are more or less independent. They are always simultaneously present, although to varying degrees, and each develops alongside the other.

It is possible that future models of the self that are developed in WP and psychotherapy will be influenced by a continuing dialogue with psychologies developed in Indian cultures, especially insofar as concerns emerge that transcend culture-bound conceptual limitations.

For Engler (1998), the two approaches can be recognised as stages in the development of the self. While WP has mapped out the early stages of development, IP has extended this into the realm where there is only the one transcendent Self and has attempted to map this landscape. Both approaches are talking about the same continuum of development, but different segments.

A small number of modern psychologists have begun research on the problems of egocentrism and ways of transcending it (Bauer & Waynet, 2008). In IP, the ego is

understood to be unreal or an obstacle to Realisation, and is to be transcended (Swami Nikhilanada, 2008). Levenson, Aldwin and Cupertino (2001) also see advanced adult development being a transcendence of the ego. In their liberation model of self-transcendence, the self is seen as a construct of attachments and aversions which need to be transcended through non-attachment. This understanding is mirrored in the realisation and practice of the study participants. Similarly, Baltes, Reese and Lipsitt (1980) argue that, while the ego development models focus on achieving gains and mitigating losses, loss is inherent in development, and is perhaps its most important component.

It appears that there is a congruent place between IP and a growing sector of WP, where transcending the ego is seen as possible and necessary to allow a deeper experience of the non-separation of the ego from the fundamental ground of being. This experience is seen as a necessary step in reaching wisdom and the full potential of adult development.

An amalgam of these two powerful theoretical frameworks, Eastern and Western, clearly has the potential to lead to the transformation of practice, one that acknowledges the role of the Self, in relation to the many 'selves'. This is seen as an inclusive process that does not reject current psychological thought, but adds another dimension – a spiritual one. It is hoped that this study will contribute empirical data (on the 'Self' in relation to the 'selves'), from an IP viewpoint, to the overall psychological landscape, and establish the importance of including an approach to psychological practice that does not ignore the spiritual dimension.

The value of spirituality in psychological health

IP provides an esoteric and spiritual approach to, and understanding of, human nature (Rao, Paranjpe & Dalai,2008). Within the context of this study, the term 'spirituality' relates to processes, practices or lifestyles for uncovering and connecting with the inner consciousness that is the Self. This is in contrast with 'religion', which refers to organised doctrine and practice within a religious institution (Hill et al., 2000) and which is not necessarily

synonymous with the ego-transcendence integral to the understanding of spirituality as found in IP.

A number of modern IP researchers emphasise the need to restore the 'voice' of spirituality into psychological research and theorisation (Bhawuk, 2003; Dalal, 2010; Mohan, 1999). This is in concordance with a growing number of Western psychologists. Fenwick (2004) identifies the major and relatively rapid shift underway in the field of psychiatry. Using the example of the British Psychological Society, he discusses the special interest group in spiritual psychiatry at the Royal College of Psychiatrists. This is becoming the fastest-growing sector, with over eight hundred psychiatrists joining in the first four years – an indication of the necessity to include spiritual aspects when dealing with psychological wellbeing.

Fostering the Heart: towards a spiritual psychology

With the resurgence in the humanistic viewpoint, there has been a renewed interest in the role of spirituality in mental health and this has begun to be investigated scientifically (Huber & MacDonald, 2011; Slife, Hope, & Nebeker, 1999). This study hopes to add the perspective of IP to this discussion, drawing on its innate connection with ancient historical traditions, but also linking it to modern, humanistic thought, especially that related to spirituality.

There is a great deal of evidence pertaining to the psychological benefits of an active and deep spiritual life. Although religious fundamentalism is associated with dogmatic thinking and authoritarianism (Altemeyer, 2003), many studies have examined, proven and replicated the extraordinary benefits of a strong spiritual connection. Townsend, Kladder, Ayele and Mulligan (2002) reviewed all randomised and non-randomised controlled trials measuring the relationship between spiritualty and health, published from 1966 to 1999, and reported positive measurable health outcomes. In studies conducted by Peterson and Seligman (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) participation in spiritual activities was associated with reduced

tobacco, drug and alcohol use, less likelihood of marital conflict, and a greater ability to cope with stressful life events. They thus demonstrated its worth to modern psychological practice across a number of therapeutic applications.

A review of a number of studies reveals that intrinsic spirituality exhibits both preventative and therapeutic effects on psychological health outcomes (Kennedy, 1998; Lindenthal, Myers, Pepper, & Stern, 1970; Pargament & Brant, 1998; Thorson, 1998; Wilson, 1998). Koenig, George and Peterson (1998) found that depressed patients with higher intrinsic spirituality remitted from depression significantly more quickly than those with low intrinsic spirituality. Markides, Levin and Ray (1987) identified that the baseline of youngsters with frequent participation in spiritual activities actually predicted a significantly lower rate of depression in these participants years later, implying that being spiritually orientated as a youngster may serve as a sort of inoculation against later depression.

In a review of hundreds of papers, Larsen, Sawyers and McCollough (1997) found that spirituality had a great benefit in preventing, coping with, and healing from mental illness. It increases positive emotions and thought-states, including hope, forgiveness, empowerment, self-esteem, contentment and joy (George, Larson, Koenig, & McCullough, 2000; Seybold & Hill, 2001). It is these positive emotion states which, through psycho-neurological and psycho-physiological networks, positively affect psychological and physical health (Levin, 2001).

Several researchers have confirmed that, in order to truly benefit from religion in a meaningful and significant way, the religiosity must be intrinsic (Kass, et al., 1991; Kennedy, Kanthamani, & Planner, 1994). Batson, Schoenrade and Ventis (1993) analysed over one hundred studies and found a positive correlation between personal religion and mental health. Amongst all religious/spiritual variables, a high level of intrinsic spirituality seems to be the greatest predictor of good health outcomes. As Levin (2001, p. 168) says, *"We offer evidence*

for a promising theory of why one's inner spiritual life might be associated with states of consciousness beneficial for health and well-being." Levin investigated the association between the inner life and the outer life and the peculiar state known as "absorption", which is associated with altered states of consciousness and feelings of deep love, which he identifies as the most important factor in psychological and physical health.

Numerous studies by both doctors and scientists have also shown the powerful positive effect that the feeling of love has on us, love being a central facet of spiritual life. In fact Dr Siegel, a physician and scientist from Yale University, states, "*Unconditional love is the most powerful stimulant of the immune system.*" (Siegel cited in Levin, 2001, p. 88) A sense of constant unconditional love from God is particularly evident in Indian spirituality, where God is typically portrayed in a loving, caring, compassionate way (Diener, Diener, & Diener, 1995) rather than in the authoritarian punitive way God is seen by many branches of the Christian tradition (Apple, 2001)

The common prayers and songs chanted in India are ones extolling God's virtues and describing ways in which he saves devotees in need. The thread of unconditional love and union with God is woven clearly and conspicuously through nearly all rites, rituals and prayers, and is integral to the lives of all study participants. When asked to describe their experience of God, they said things like "*God is with me all the time*", "*God takes care of me*", "*God loves me*", "*God listens to my prayers and always answers them".* Levin (2001) also underscores this point, arguing that keeping the lines of communication open, with whatever or whomever we conceive God to be, is among the healthiest things we can do. In Vedanta, this is termed 'bhakti yoga'.

Looking Beyond: seeing into the truth of the apparent phenomena

Bhakti yoga (devotion) is an important aspect of IP, suggesting the sense of unconditional love from, and for 'God', which is integral to *bhakti* yoga, plays a key role in positive and healthy mental states such as those displayed in the study participants. Connection with the Self gives them resilience in their lives. With that connection in place, they gain the ability to be truly joyful, grateful and optimistic, in spite of their circumstances. When I went to interview one participant, he was gazing at the wreckage of his Ashram, most of which had just been swept away with his cows when the Ganges River had flooded two days previously. I was greeted with a smile and this simple Vedic chant:

*"**Purnamadah Purnamidam Purnaat Purnamudachyate***

Purnasya Purnaamadaya Purnameva Vashishyate.

This is complete and whole.

That is complete and whole.

Everything is complete and whole.

When wholeness is removed from wholeness, wholeness remains.

When wholeness is added to wholeness, wholeness remains.

Wholeness is, in fact, all there is.

I am complete. I am whole. I am perfect.

I was always complete.

There is nothing in me other than completion, wholeness and perfection …" (G6)

The Cry from the Heart: the need for synthesis

Filling in the Gaps: IP's contribution

An increasing number of psychologists hold that there is a critical need to bring spirituality back into modern psychological theory, practice and research (Bhawuk, 2003; Schmidt-Wilk, Heaton, & Steingard, 2000). This reflects a growing view that WP has found itself challenged in dealing with the psychological and social problems that are faced by many people (Paranjpe, 1998; Rao, Paranjpe, & Dalal, 2004). The inadequacies of theories of personality, learning, emotions and human potential are identified by Sinha (1965). The positivist approach has been identified as having limitations in dealing with psychological responses to modern social problems (Banister et al., 2011; Ponterotto, 2005). Worchel and Cooper (1989) discuss this in relation to its inability to handle inner, personal, cultural and subjective aspects of life. Psychotherapy is in a process of change, reflecting this greater philosophical dilemma (van den Van den Bos, 1996).

In addition, it is clear that current theories and methods are also inadequate to deal with some important aspects of human nature that appear to be simply beyond their scope (Rao, 2004). Cornelissen (2008b) insists that the systematic use of IP's psycho-spiritual knowledge for the attainment of higher forms of consciousness (related to the essential, intrinsic nature of the human being) must become part and parcel of psychological training and practice. Taylor (2010) argues that there is no doubt that IP has important implications for the future of psychology in all its fields, as it has the ability to create a theoretical and practical framework to address some of the deeper issues behind the social challenges of the age. Such challenges have been identified as rising levels of depression, suicide, addiction and anxiety in those sectors of society that are well-off materially (Lufher, 2003).

Alternative or Synthetic: What is it IP has to offer?

Indian approaches to psychology may have the potential to address the particular concerns of those who have based their lives around material possessions, as it extends the value of life to areas beyond these concerns. Since the 1970s, many psychotherapists have started reporting a new kind of client – one who has no apparent problems, is well-to-do, well-adjusted and successful in a worldly sense, yet reports an inner emptiness, a lack of meaning or purpose in life (Saraswati, 2008). Whereas conventional psychotherapy has very little to offer (Ibid), IP has the potential to address such concerns because it presents a map of perpetual growth.

Walsh (1988) and Miovic (2008) take key concepts about human nature, such as motivation and the nature of identity, causes of pathology and the potential for psychological maturity through an orientation towards ethics and service, and demonstrate their relevance for psychotherapeutic techniques. Jha (2008) purports that both close scrutiny and critical evaluation of the IP concept of personality provide existing concepts of personality, and its realization, with a sound alternative paradigm. Anand (2004) and Paranjpe (2009) present the relevance of emerging IP perspectives on pain and suffering, which could shed light on the dilemmas facing many who, while materially well-off, still experience considerable pain in their lives (Lufher, 2003).

Dalal and Misra (2006), Bhawuk (1999a) and Kumar (2004) present IP perspectives on personal harmony, peace and well-being as being essential for the survival of the global community with its increasing stress levels. Bhawuk (2008a) has also given cognition, emotion and behaviour a new significance by anchoring them in the IP concept of desire. There is an increasing use of mindfulness meditation in clinical psychology and extensive research into its uses in clinical practice (Davis & Hayes, 2011). Over the past 50 years, several hundred research studies have demonstrated numerous significant findings including changes in psychological, physiological, and transpersonal realms (Shapiro & Walsh, 2003)

The complex interplay between these realms has led to some therapists calling for an integrative or synthetic approach (Smith, Spillane, & Annus, 2006), The potential contribution of IP in general, and this study in particular, could be seen as helping to promote such an approach, especially in relation to cross-cultural psychology. Naturally, such a contribution has to be interpreted in light of the culture from which it has emerged (Dein, 2005), hence the predominance of Indian spiritual practitioners my study. However, this does not diminish the potential contribution that this study could make to psychological theory and practice, through its focus on the relationship of the practitioners' experience (the practice) to the textual foundations of IP (the theory).

One Foundation for a Global Psychology: IP's potential in the current human condition

The IP concept of Self, when added to the models developed by key figures in psychology such as Jung (1996), Perls (1973), Rogers (1980) and Kohut (1971), allows for the completion of the natural quest for wholeness (integration of body, mind and spirit). The IP Self can be seen as both the source and the fulfilment of the religious function of the psyche, in that it fulfils the inner search for union with God. IP provides personal integration of all aspects of the Self, through meditation and other spiritual practices which allow for deep experiential understanding.

It could be considered that, although IP is an indigenous psychology derived from indigenous Indian thought, it is much more than this. As Rao (2008b, pp. 1-18) points out, it offers fruitful psychological models and theories for all of humanity and *"constitutes a coherent and consistent system with universal relevance",* providing a much needed perspective for an expanded view of psychological theory and practice.

Marsella (Marsella, 1994) entreated researchers to replace Western cultural traditions with broader multicultural ones, and presented a template for "global-community psychology". This study has the potential to augment such a template. It is clear that the cutting edge and future of psychology must be found within such broader currents of holistic thinking.

2 Ancient Indian Texts

Introduction

This chapter briefly describes the core texts of India which I utilised to identify and establish the process of Self- Realisation , as it was understood around 5,000 years ago when it was first conceived (Swami Nikhilanada, 2008). It provides a brief overview, through utilising a story which symbolically illustrates the deeper, underlying truths and insights contained in Vedanta. This is a method typically utilised in Vedic literature (Swami Nikhilanada, 1951), which correlates with modern qualitative textural analysis (Carley, 1993). Applied to selected chapters of the *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad Gita*, it depicts realisation as a central concept, and determines the dominant themes which would guide the development and design of the data collection and analysis for this study..

The importance of this emerges in the process of identifying areas of inter-concordance between the scriptural/textural description and those of the emergent themes from the data (Carley, 1993). To facilitate an understanding of the material revealed in the texts, some maps have been developed, allowing for greater understanding of the principles outlined. The maps have been used to guide the creation of interview questions.

What are the *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad Gita*?

Containing the essence of Vedic[12] thought, the *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad Gita* are considered to be the foundation of Indian philosophical and psychological thought (Radhkrishnan, 2008). They have been linked to both philosophy and science in providing a view of reality that is both speculative and scientific (in that it can be tested through personal experience) and, as such, are seen to have the potential to contribute to psychological frameworks (Ranade, 1986). They develop knowledge on the nature of reality, both

[12]The Vedas are the most ancient scriptures of India, that describe the nature of reality and creation

individual and collective, and also provide guidelines for investigating this perceived nature. Western philosophers, such as Schopenhauer, Max Mueller and Goethe have all drawn from the *Upanishads* (Engler, 1998; Levenson, Aldwin, & Cupertino, 2012; Piaget, 1950) in the development of their philosophical ideas.

While the *Upanishads* are described as the 'cow' (the source of wisdom), the *Bhagavad Gita*, which was written later, is considered the 'milk', as it distils and crystallises many of the concepts in the *Upanishads* and makes them relevant to the everyday person (Rama, 1996).

The conceptual framework of the realisation of the Self is profound and difficult to grasp. Following an ancient Vedic method, an illustrative story from one of the *Upanishads* has been selected as it contains, in essence, the core teachings of all the *Upanishads* and also shares a common conceptual framework with the *Bhagavad Gita* (Giri, 2010b). It has been selected in order to clearly outline the process of Self-realisation according to Indian psychology.

This story follows the development of the personality as it successively transcends each of its aspects, from physical through social, mental, emotional, intellectual and blissfully loving, to the realisation of the true nature of Self. These aspects are categorised, and illustrated in the form of models, that I developed in order to allow for the creation of relationships with psychological frameworks. Consequently, this non-Western psychological model can be contrasted to both the findings of the research and also conventional psychological models.

From the self to the Self: An exposition of Self-realisation based on the *Katha Upanishad*

There is a story that forms the basis of the *Katha Upanishad* (KU), which revolves around the interaction between Nachiketa (a young aspirant) and Lord Yama (the Lord of Death, Lord of Dharma /right living). It describes the knowledge of the Self in a lucid style, often considered to be unparalleled in the Vedic scriptures. Max Mueller (1884/2006, pp. 1-28) has praised it

as being regarded by French, German and English translators as "one of the most perfect specimens of the mystic philosophy and poetry of the ancient Hindus." It contains teachings about the Self and the ways to achieve it.

The idea that useful and practical psychological models can be derived from classical texts is supported by Bhawuk (Bhawuk, 2010a), Cornelissen (2005) and Kumar (2008). The KU offers a detailed conceptual model of the psychological make-up of the individual, in which a clear distinction is made between the essential Self and the multiple selves that belong to the ego. This conceptualization of the Self is not only critical to understanding psychological processes in the Indian cultural context, but I contend that it may be useful for providing an enlarged context for a global psychology. It has inspired this research topic.

A journey from the outer to the inner

The main theme of the KU is that the real Self is to be found within, and the goal of life is to discover it. One who has realized this Self knows it as the cosmic Self which encompasses the whole universe, and finds unsullied happiness in this unity.

The story of Nachiketa starts when his father makes the mistake of sacrificing cows that are useless (instead of healthy, more expensive cows) at a *yagna*[13]. To try and save his father from this mistake, Nachiketa offers to be the sacrifice instead of the cattle. In anger, his father gives him to the Lord of Death, Yama. Nachiketa proceeds to the abode of Death where he waits for three days. To make amends for leaving Nachiketa waiting, Yama gives him three boons (favours). The first two are easy to provide; however, for the third boon, Nachiketa requests knowledge of the highest wisdom. Yama then subjects Nachiketa to rigorous testing in the form of temptations of the senses and ego. In spite of these formidable challenges, Nachiketa persists in his aspiration for Truth.

[13] A sacrificial fire

In this manner the story illustrates the subjective propensities and objective tendencies which must be overcome in the process of the search for true identity. Pleased with Nachiketa's persistence and character, Yama finally outlines the necessary conditions for such Self-realization, and initiates Nachiketa into the mysteries of the Self.

The five-sheath model of human personality

This story presents consciousness in its multi-faceted manifestations, while retaining the core identity as its basic attribute. It recognises a multi-layered existence – five sheaths, (*pancha koshas*) of the human being, which potentially evolve towards higher levels of existence. The progression of this story aligns itself with these sheaths and the aspect of self which is identified with each one of them, progressing from gross to progressively subtle (Swami Ranganathanda, 2007).

The Koshas – the sheaths of manifestation

Starting at the gross level, *annamaya kosha* is considered the physical or social self, followed by *pranamaya kosha*, the vital self, and *manomaya kosha*, the mental/emotional self. These three outer sheaths envelop and shroud the two innermost layers, *vijnanamaya kosha*, the discriminative self and *anandamaya kosha*, the loving, blissful self. Beyond the sheaths, at the most subtle level, is *Atman*, the unchanging eternal Self, said to reside in the spiritual heart, *Hridaya* (KU. ii. v. 4-5). (See Fig. 1.)

In this model there are multiple layers, connected in a concentric form to a core. It acknowledges the manifest diversity of the phenomenological world with an inner unity of the transcendent. In this way it would appear to have the potential to provide a model of the human being which can incorporate all the apparent differences and contradictions of what the self is, debated in WP, as discussed in the previous chapter.

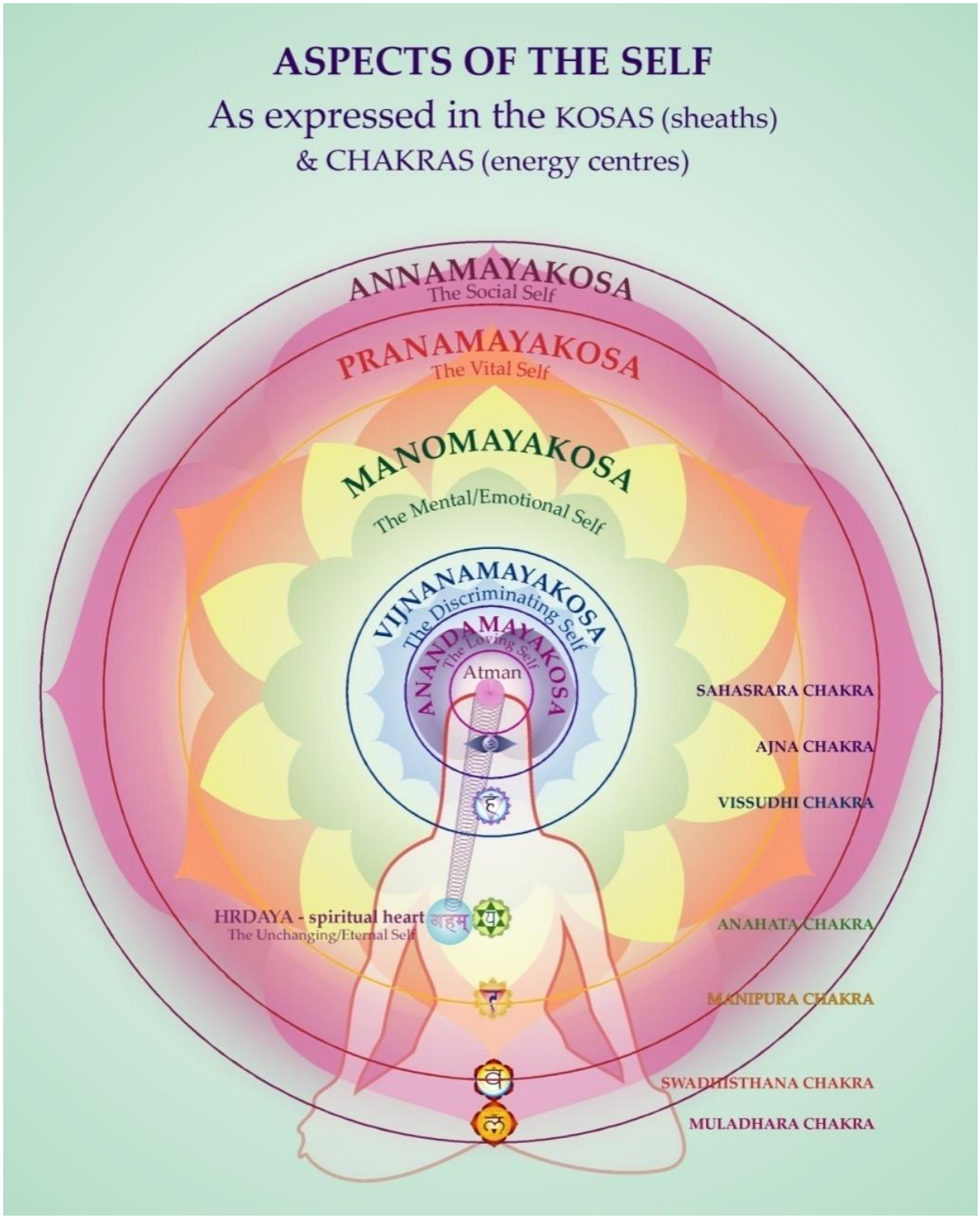

Fig. 1: Aspects of the Self in Manifestation

This model arises from a synthesis of the concepts found in KU and *Yoga Kundalini Upanishad* (Feurnstein, 2008). The *koshas* appear to be an early concept describing the levels of the human organism, whereas *chakras* appear in later literature. However, both concepts are an attempt to explain the levels of human existence and the progression that occurs in the process of Self-realisation.

In this model, the contingent and acquired identities of each 'self' (related to a *kosha* or a *chakra*) are not confused with the core identity (*atman*), which remains unaffected and functions as the witness. Apparent existence is considered as illusion or relative reality (*maya/prakriti)* within which normal life is carried out. This is given independent and greater significance than a subtler form of existence –*Brahman*., This is due to misunderstanding (*avidya)*, which is also the main cause for attachments and consequent suffering. Bhawuk (2008a) presents a similar synthesis of *pancha koshas* (the five sheaths) and psychological concepts of socially-constructed realities. At each level of self, there are challenges which must be overcome and principles which must be developed, in order to progress to a higher level of evolution. Although Bhawuk presents these in a linear fashion, all aspects of self are seen as mutually interdependent and interpenetrating (Giri, 2010b). However, expansion of identity, so that it is more encompassing and inclusive, is critical, moving from the gross to the subtle, the outer to the inner. This implies a transcendence of the boundaries of the ego (as it is not the real identity) and, in this way, results in liberation from various attachments, overcoming suffering and ignorance.

The model proposes that one can continue engagement in the world and yet strive towards liberation. Increasingly, the outer levels assume less importance and there develops a firm anchoring to following the inner path. The *Taittiriya Upanishad* Ch. I.ii-3 (Swami Shivananda, 1983) also gives an in-depth description of the process of moving inward

through each of the sheaths or apparent realities, until the eternal consciousness at the most subtle layer is experienced.

Annamaya Kosha: The physical sheath

Very early on, the story of Nachiketa and Yama demonstrates that renunciation of sense pleasure and worldly desires is required for Self-realisation. As Yama states:

> *"Perfection (sreyas) is one thing, and enjoyment (preyas) another; these two having different ends, which engage men differently. He who chooses perfection becomes pure. He who chooses enjoyment misses his true end. The wise man, having examined both, distinguishes one from another. He chooses perfection as being superior to enjoyment, but the foolish man chooses enjoyment for the pleasure of the body." (KU 1 .v. 2)* (Swami Shivananda, 1983, p. 81)

Bhawuk (2008b, pp. 390-413) clearly depicts these two choices in his model '*Indian Concept of Self: Expanding social and true self.'* Detachment is seen to lead to realisation of *Brahman (*the Self), whilst desire and attachment lead to a limited sense of social self. Sathya Sai Baba (1970, p. 63) elaborates: *"The first releases. The second leashes. One leads to salvation, the other to incarceration! If you pursue the preyas path, you leave the realisation of the highest goal of man far, far behind."*

Thus, at the level of the *annamaya kosha* or social self, a choice must be made to divert the mind from the outward, objective world to the truth within. This is depicted in Fig. 3, where the aspects of outward (becoming/diversity/separation) and inward (being/unity/oneness) processes are mapped in terms of the levels of experience and the shifting nature of the personality. The choice of where to place one's attention leads to either awakening or forgetfulness, selflessness or egotism, wholeness and oneness or individual separateness.

At the level of *annamaya kosha*, the practice of right living, of aligning one's behaviour with *dharma* and practicing self-restraint in order to overcome bad habits and perfect the personality, is emphasised. The development of good character, morality and virtues is essential in order to progress (KU .iv. ii. 3).

Pranamaya Kosha: The energetic sheath

Yama emphasises the importance of the practice of action without the sense of being the doer (*Nishkarma Karma*) through the analogy of a chariot (KU1.iii.3-4), not unlike the one found in Plato's Phaedrus (Radhakrishnan, 1996) and that which is represented in the *Bhagavad Gita* (Swami Chidbhavananda, 1982). The chariot analogy (see Fig. 2) serves as a symbol for the complex psychological nature of humans striving to gain knowledge of their true identity through mastering their psychological makeup. The chariot model identifies important steps in the process of Self-realisation, therefore is worthy of careful analysis. It contributes to an understanding of the ancient Indian view towards the body, mind, higher intellect and senses by identifying the ways in which they can be harnessed to facilitate Self-realization, and to ensure the full and balanced flow of *prana* or life-force (Sathya Sai Baba, 2001, p. 174). In this way it is supplementary to Fig. 1.

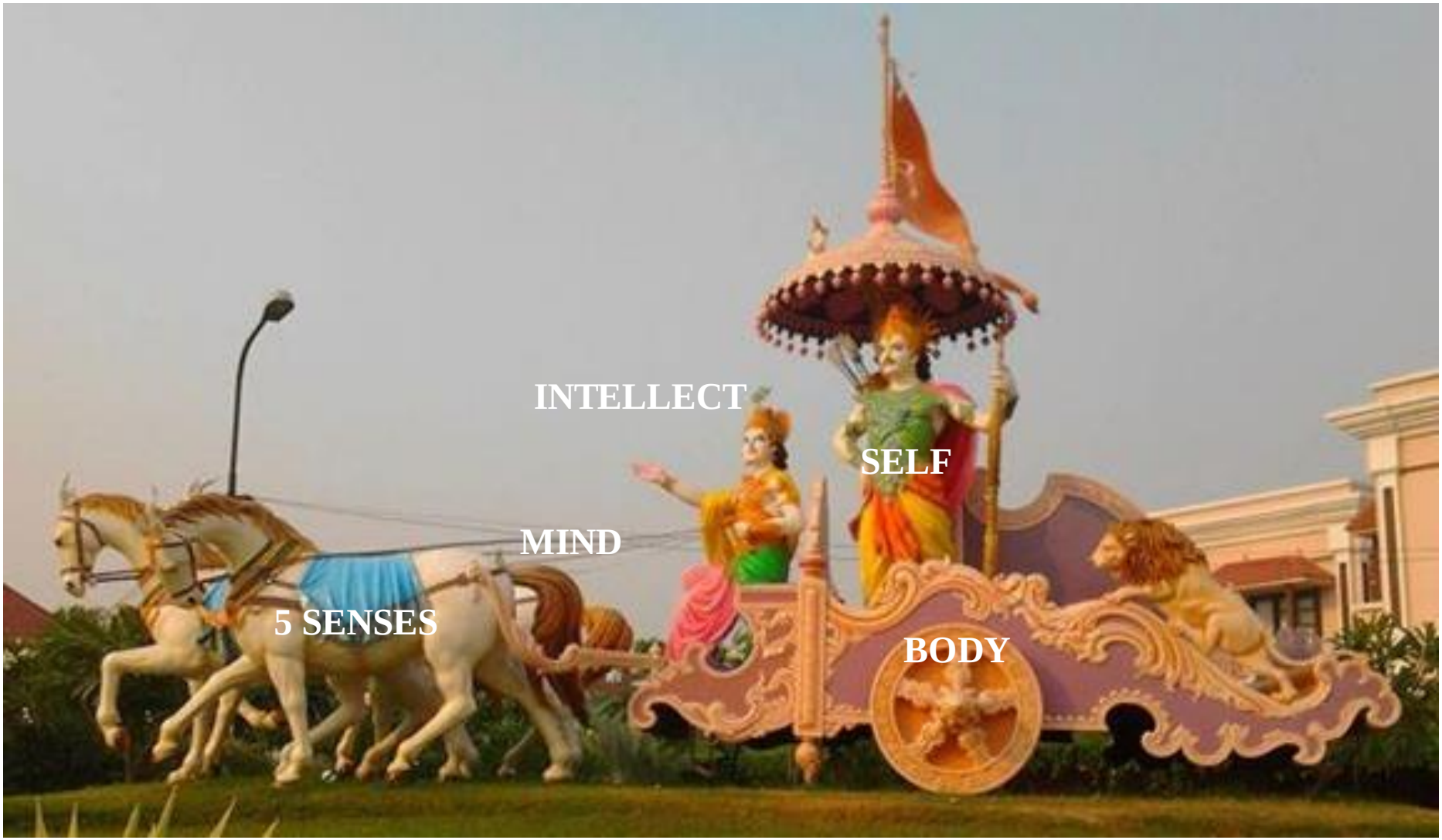

Fig. 2: The Chariot Model

The first idea set forth in this model (drawn from the Upnaishads) is the completely inactive role of the Self (*atman,)* which is an observer only due to its nature being pure consciousness. This is represented by the rider in the chariot, who is observing the charioteer (the intellect). Every other aspect of the human being is actively involved in the process of life, the Self being an observer only.

"Know the Self is the rider, and the body the chariot; that the intellect is the charioteer, and the mind the reins." (KU 1.iii.3)

The body is the physical vehicle (chariot) for the journey to Realisation; therefore how we relate to it has potential significance. If there is identification with the body, then there is subjection to the will and whim of the body. If there is no identification with the body, then there is the potential for freedom from its dictates.

The intellect (in the context of IP) is the *buddhi*, the faculty of direct spiritual awareness. By likening this to the charioteer, it indicates that our direction in life is produced solely through the agency of the intellect. The process of Self-realisation is primarily a matter of intellect, which reconstructs awareness. While external practices and disciplines assist on the journey to Self-realisation, their value is intended to affect the *buddhi* (intellect) in its striving towards realisation. The mind being the reins could be viewed as the intermediary between the *buddh*i and the physical realm relating to the body (KU1.ii.3).

The next element in the model is the horses which represent the senses:

"*The senses are the horses; the roads they travel are the mazes of desire."* (KU1.ii.4)

It is the senses that can direct the body according to their impulses. If the *buddhi* (charioteer) is weak or underdeveloped, the senses overpower the mind, utilising the pain/pleasure motivation. Thus the *buddhi* is side-lined, allowing a type of enslavement to the body and

senses, which prevents realisation of the true nature of the self, because the senses have distracted the mind.

As Yama states: *"He whose horses are well broken and whose reins are strong and kept well in the hands of the charioteer (the intellect aligned with the Supreme) reaches the goal which is the state of Him, the Omnipresent." (KU 1.iii, . 3) (Swami Nikhilanada, 2008, p. 148)*

It is important to recognise that, in this *Upanishad* model, the chariot (body) is used for the performance of a journey; the process of living in this world is the journey, the destination is Self-realisation. In the absolute sense, the individual soul and the Supreme Soul are one. But, in this world of relative reality, there is an apparent duality. The individual soul temporarily forgets its oneness with all and thinks of itself as the doer, separate from the Supreme Self. Yama instructed Nachiketa that, once the reality of the Self is realized, one will not be moved by the dual idea of 'doer' and 'not doer'.

Manomaya Kosha: The mental/emotional sheath

Whereas Western psychology has focused on achieving individual goals (Hartmann, 1964), the *Upanishads* point to the necessity of transcending such desire, attachment and egotism. When a person thinks about an object or subject, attachment arises. This leads to desire. From desire, both greed and anger manifest. Bhawuk (1999b) has captured this process in his model of personal disharmony. Yama emphasises the importance of understanding desire, so that it can be transcended (KU.2.iii.14.).

Control of the senses is seen as an important aspect of this process. The senses have outgoing tendencies, so the mind has to be withdrawn from the outer world and turned within in order to halt this outward flow. Meditation then becomes possible. According to Yama, the key to realising the Self is a tranquil mind and unwavering equanimity. This can only be achieved once there is a purification of the tendencies of desire and attachment. *"Through a tranquil*

mind one realizes the Self which is set in the heart of every creature." (KU. 2i v.1) (Swami Nikhilanada, 2008, p. 169)

Once the focus on sense gratification and the desire for material objects is reduced, the mind is able to develop a steady and uninterrupted practice of concentration and contemplation on divinity, both within and without (*bhakti* yoga). In this way, it can move ever closer to the Self within.

The choice of manomaya kosha

The *koshas* are depicted as manifestations of each level of the process/journey, either outward or inward, and these levels relate to the qualities required in the process of outward or inward focus. The inward path can be seen to focus on the whole, the oneness, which leads to the awakening of one's true nature: a state of 'being'. On the other hand, an outward focus leads to forgetfulness of the inner reality and a focus on individuality, i.e. identifying as the separate ego self as opposed to being identified with the universal consciousness, the Self.

A model (Fig. 3) has been developed to depict this knowledge embedded in the texts. It illustrates the dynamism of the process which is set in motion once the individual makes a choice (at the level of the *manomaya kosha*) to direct attention within.

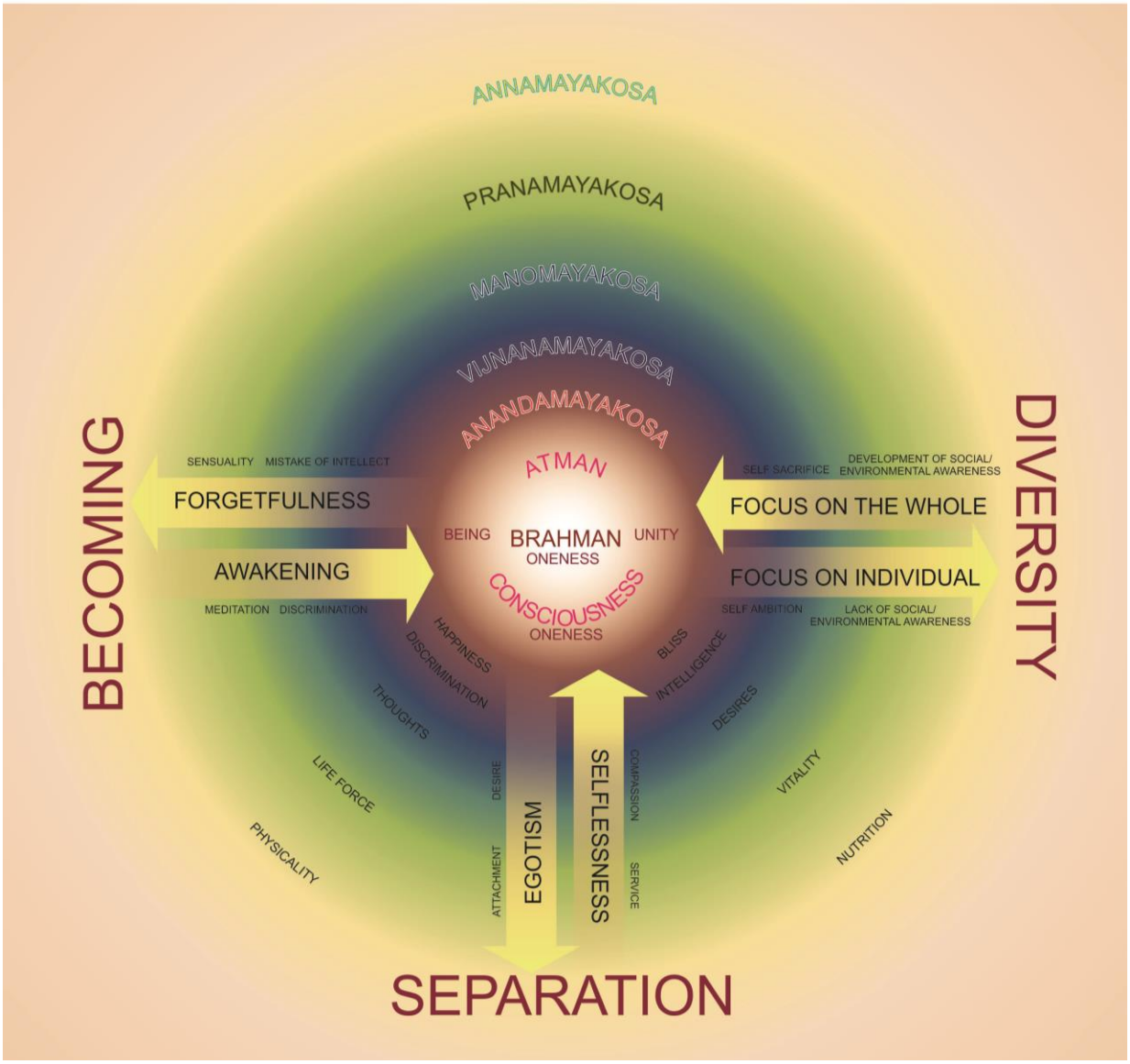

Fig. 3: Being and becoming in relationship to the koshas and their manifestation

Vijnanamaya Kosha: The wisdom sheath

Discriminating intellect **(***buddhi*) is seen as a critical element for self-control, further loosening the bonds of egoism and ignorance. Yama describes it: *"If the buddhi, being related to a mind that is always distracted, loses its discrimination, then the senses become uncontrolled, like the vicious horses of a charioteer*."(KU I.iii.5) (Swami Nikhilanada, 2008, p. 149)

Conversely, *"A spiritual aspirant who, through control of the mind, is capable of discriminating between good and evil can use his sense organs to his advantage and*

ultimately realize the goal. For him the sense organs do not offer an obstacle." (KU I. iii.6) (Swami Nikhilanada, 2008, p. 149)

The *vijnanamaya kosha* relates to discrimination between the self and the Self' This path of knowledge (*jnana*) involves self-enquiry. Through self-enquiry, Nachiketa confirmed that the Atman is not to be confused with the body and the senses, or the vital energy, the mind, emotions and intellect (KU1.ii.2). Through practice of awareness and meditation, he also discovered the tranquil self, described by Yama: *"The wise man should merge his speech in his mind, and his mind in his intellect. He should merge his intellect into the Cosmic Mind, and the Cosmic Mind in the tranquil Self."* (KU I.iii.1)3 (Swami Nikhilanada, 2008, p. 155)

Anandamaya Kosha: the bliss sheath

Through meditation, the state of perfect unruffled equanimity can be achieved. Yama said: *'The self-existent Supreme Lord inflicted injury upon the sense organs in creating them with outgoing tendencies; therefore a man perceives only outer objects with them, and not the inner Self. But a calm person, wishing for immortality, beholds the inner Self with his eyes closed."* (KU II.i.1) (Swami Nikhilanada, 2008, p. 169)

He describes this innermost Self (*Atman)* as the experiencing witness. *"The image of the sun in a lake quivers and shakes due to the quivering and shaking of the water; the sun is but a distant witness. It is unaffected by the media which produces the images. The Atman likewise is the witness of all this change in space and time."* (KU II.i.1) (Swami Nikhilanada, 2008, p. 169)

Beyond the senses, it is limitless, eternal and endless, subtler than the subtle, the prime instrument for all activity and knowledge, the inner motive force behind everything. It is described as residing in *hridaya*, the spiritual heart, "like a flame without smoke". It is identical to Brahman (Swami Nikhilanada, 2008, p. 167).

Brahman

At the culmination of the story, Nachiketa understands the wisdom (*Brahma vidya*) that Yama taught him, and reaches the highest realisation of undifferentiated identification with the Supreme Self *(Brahman* or *Purusha).*

> *"Beyond the senses are the objects; beyond the objects is the mind, the intellect; beyond the intellect, the Great Atman; beyond the great Atman, the Unmanifest; beyond the unmanifest, the Purusha. Beyond the Purusha there is nothing; this is the end, the Supreme goal."* (KU I.iii. 10) (Swami Nikhilanada, 2008, p. 152)

In this state (*nirvikalpa samadhi)* the illusion of all the separate selves, of diversity, departs and the individual is no longer perceived to be separate from the One.

"As the torrent of rain falling on a peak is shattered downwards in a thousand streams, the Jivi [individual soul], who feels many-ness and difference, falls down through many-ness and goes to waste." (KU ii.iIii. 17) (Swami Nikhilanada, 2008, p. 157).

The Chakras – energetic centres of manifestation

The model of Self-realisation presented in the *Kathopanishad* is consistent with the concept of chakras found in later *Upanishads* such as the *Yoga Kundalini Upanishad* (Feurnstein, 2008). Just as the sheath model depicts a transition from the gross to the subtle, the chakra model depicts movement from base desires and passions to mergence with universal consciousness, through a process of purification. Each of the sheaths relates to one of the chakras. The *kundalini* (primordial energy) is held in the *muladhara chakra* (equivalent to *annamaya kosha*) and passes through each subsequent chakra (each relating to a *kosha*) in the movement toward realisation.

Transcending the personality

In the process of Self-realisation that emerges from the KU, there is a successive transcendence of each aspect of the personality, unfolding the true nature of the Self. The KU makes it clear that lasting happiness and peace do not lie in changing the external circumstances, but in understanding one's own real nature and allowing it to manifest in life.

This is supported by other significant Indian texts. In the *Shivoham Stotra,* Sankacharya (Vande India, 2009) describes the need to transcend the physical and social self, declaring the real self to be a metaphysical one. He identifies the real self as the formless power everywhere. The *Yoga Vasistha* (Ramana Maharshi, 1999) describes the world and the physical self as reflections of the true self. It characterises its attainment as *jivanmukta,* a stage beyond cognition and emotion, where one both lives in the world, yet enjoys the profound happiness of the Self.

Patanjali's Yoga Sutras (Feurnstein, 2008)focus on realising one's true nature through the development of an attitude of non-attachment and character development. Understanding desires and managing them is seen as critical to evolving to more subtle aspects of being. The *Bhagavad Gita* (Swami Shivananda, 2008) emphasises the need for transcending attachment to the fruits of one's endeavours in order to attain the lasting peace and happiness of the Self. It teaches the importance of transcending cognition, emotion and the inclination to be bound in the three outer sheaths, by the development of wise discrimination.

The perennial wisdom of the *Upanishads* can be seen as the well from which IP draws its water (concepts and philosophies). The KU provides many insights into the process of transformation that occurs at various levels of the personality, including the physical, social, vital, mental, emotional and intellectual. It contains detailed descriptions of more subtle aspects, which are increasingly experienced as one moves toward realization, and it attempts to describe the state of realisation itself. The necessary disciplines required for progression

are outlined, as well as the challenges. I identified the following key aspects of the process of Self-realisation from the literature review of the KU and the *Bhagavad Gita*:

- Transcending the boundaries of the ego: expanding the identity so it is more encompassing and inclusive
- Overcoming desire and attachment and developing detachment
- Controlling the senses
- Understanding that in reality one is not the 'doer'
- Developing character and virtues
- Engaging in Self-enquiry
- Practising meditation
- Acknowledging the requirement for a guru

These key aspects are depicted in relation to the sheaths and chakras as described by the Indian texts, *Kathopanishad* and *Yoga-Kundalini Upanishad* (Feurnstein, 2008) in Fig. 4.

This research set out to find whether the process of realisation in modern-day practitioners is consistent with that which is set out in the *Upanishads*, as depicted in this map. These key elements identified in the KU guided the development of the study and formed the essence of the interview questions (see Appendix B).

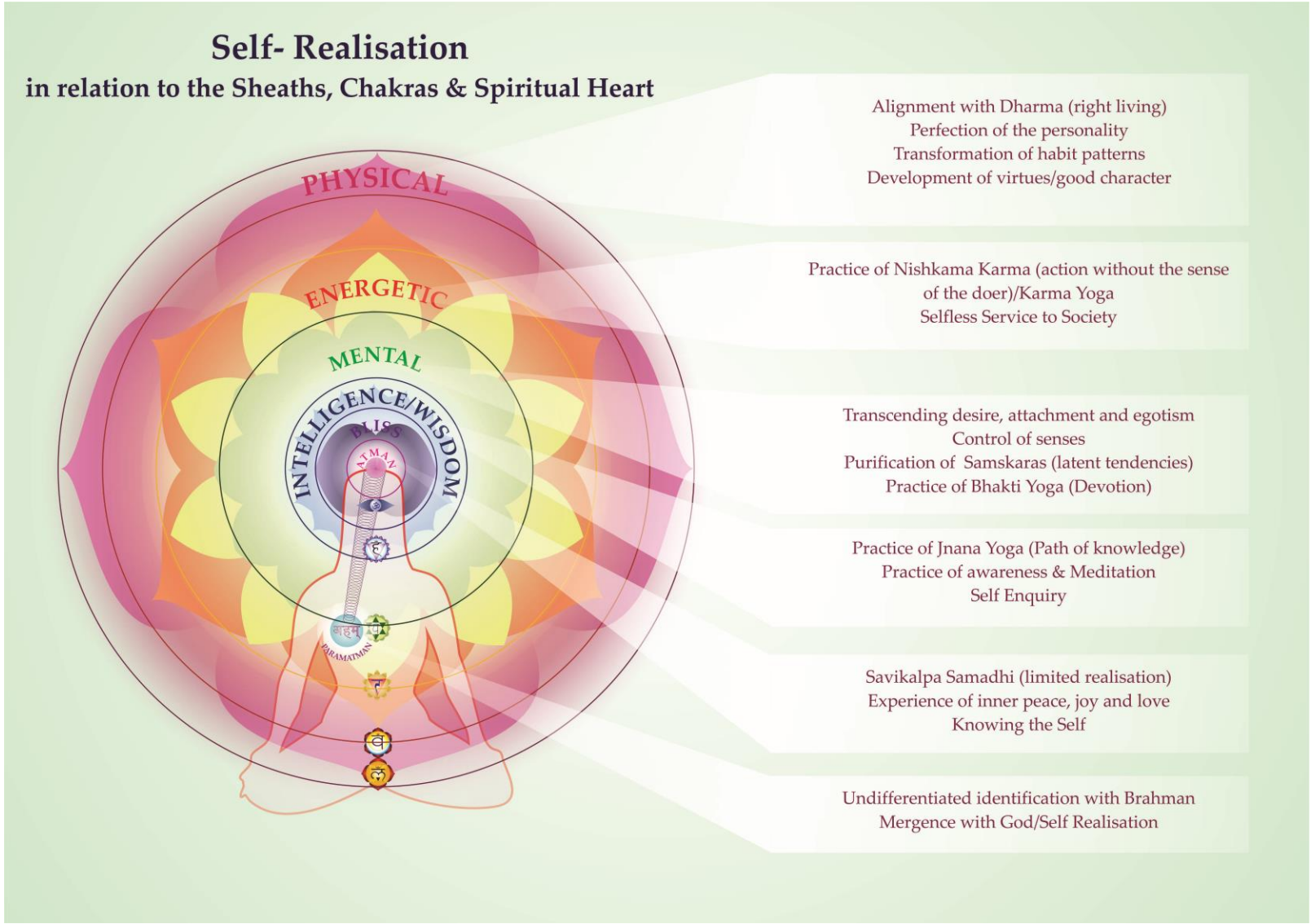

Fig. 4: The Upanishadic Map of Self-realisation which can be assessed for its relevance to human potential and well-being

Fig. 4 is a distillation of knowledge and understanding gained from repeated readings of the story of Nachiketa and Yama. It depicts the necessary steps on the path to Self-realisation, relating them to the sheaths and the practices that are involved in the purification of each sheath. As the process progresses, the realisation of the Self is experienced in increasing levels of depth, culminating in an experience of unified oneness within the heart. Every step is critical to the process, but cannot be seen as an end point. Instead, each one leads to the next step, although they could be concurrent. All these steps in the process could be identified with increasing levels of psychological health. This appears to be consistent with the increasing evidence of the link between spirituality and health.

Fig 4 also indicates areas that may provide answers to the fundamental research questions. All the models found in this chapter have had a profound influence on the question schedule and the analysis, along with the conclusion.

3 Methodological Approach: Bringing the Self to the field, creating the Self in the field

Introduction:

This chapter discusses the development of the methodology for the study, in light of how the knowledge of IP has been constructed. I describe how the interpretative, phenomenological, hermeneutical and ethnographic aspects overlap to form the holistic approach required in the research design.

It offers a description of how I ensured essential aspects of qualitative research, such as validity, rigour, transparency and credibility, were incorporated into the methodological approach. Ethical considerations, strengths, weaknesses and challenges of the study are described.

Shining a Light on ancient methodologies: The ontological basis of investigation into Indian psychology

The nature of knowledge and the way it is acquired are complex issues. Whilst scientific knowledge is viewed as something external, Vedic knowledge is transformative – it changes who one is. In relation to IP, Sri Aurobindo states that the knowledge we have to arrive at is not truth of the intellect:

> *"... it is not right belief, right opinions, right information about oneself and things,... that is only the surface mind's idea of knowledge. To arrive at some mental conception about the Self and ourselves and the world[i]s an object good for the intellect but not large enough for the spirit."*(Aurobindo, 1972, p. 685)

Whereas scientific knowledge is explicit, IP often deals with an ineffable reality that can be experienced, even realised in one's own being, but which cannot be exhaustively described. Giri (2010a) states that, if we accept that consciousness is our primary reality, then the

ultimate proof in psychology must rest in subjective experience itself. He suggests that we may have to look for an entirely different solution to the problem of reliability.

The qualitative approach to understanding psychological phenomena (in a sense a phenomenological approach, which this study utilises) has a long and rich history, from James (1842 – 1910), Mead (1863 – 1931) and Allport (1897-1967) through to researchers such as Gergen (Ashworth, 2008). It looks at consciousness through a different lens than the purely material and may be a better tool for exploring the type of consciousness that Vedanta refers to.

IP has approached the problem of how to research inner realities by focusing on the quality, purity and concentration of the inner instrument of knowledge used by the person who has had the experience (Dalal, 1996). The *Rishis*[14], the source of IP concepts, are clear that they do not construct their knowledge, but receive it directly through revelation, inspiration, intuition and intuitive discrimination. According to Aurobindo (1972) it is quite possible to recover these methods of direct knowledge and then use the reasoning mind to express a knowledge that has already been attained by these more direct means. Giri (2010a) is also convinced this approach is a powerful, effective and reliable approach for the study of inner, psychological processes. Sinha (1981) argues that, whilst science is 'tight', human experience is 'loose' and this needs to be reflected in having a holistic approach to IP research.

The approach utilised in this study attempts to encompass a research paradigm consistent with IP, its philosophical assumptions and framework (which has its source in Upanishadic understanding), its methodology, and strategies used to gather data and derive meaning from this data (Cornelissen, 2012; Rao, 2005b). This is underpinned by selection criteria chosen to

[14]The ancient sages of India who built the conceptual and practical framework of Vedanta and other philosophical systems

ensure quality in interpretative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 2000) and credibility (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

The epistemology at the root of the methodology comes from IP itself. The methods I used are consistent with methods used in qualitative endeavour (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In these I focused on the subjective experiences of participants, but used Indian/Vedic epistemology to later compare them against the guideposts of the *Upanishads*.

I integrated the Upanishadic concept that IP can only be understood fully when all thoughts are transcended. It holds that, in order to fully understand the participants' experiences and lives, intellect alone is not sufficient; it must also be known subjectively through the expansion of awareness (Mueller, 2007).

For this reason, I immersed myself in the participants' world and practiced their way of life as much as possible; this has been part of my life's journey since an early age. This method is consistent with the interpretative and naturalistic approach of quality qualitative research where researchers, *"... study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them."* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, pp. 1-29)

Interpretative research approach

The goal of this research is to create an understanding of a human phenomenon (Self-realisation) and the practitioners' experience of it. As this approach is focused on interpretative understanding and accessing the meanings of the participants' experience (as opposed to explaining or predicting their behaviour), this goal fits well with the philosophy, strategies and intentions of the interpretative research methodology (Smith, 1983). According to the interpretative paradigm, meanings are constructed by human beings in unique ways, depending on their context and personal frames of reference (Crotty, 1998). The

engagement with the world being interpreted (the theory of multiple constructed realities) is central to this type of research.

Findings emerge from the interactions between the researcher and the participants as the research progresses (Creswell, 1998). Therefore, subjectivity is valued. Because we are situated in a reality constructed by subjective experiences, it can be argued that we are incapable of total objectivity. Furthermore, research is value-bound by the nature of the questions being asked, the way the values are held by the researcher, and the ways findings are generated and interpreted.

This being so, I have chosen the interpretative approach to methodology within an ethnographic context, as it appeared the most suitable for this research. Its potential to generate new understandings of complex multi-dimensional human phenomena appealed as the methodological pathway to uncover the meaning behind the experiences of the participants.

Ethnographic context

This context enabled me to effectively research the areas of consciousness and spirituality, as its application is suited to the study of people's experiences. As these are phenomenological (which could be argued as a more holistic approach to research) in nature, they align with the holistic method of developing knowledge in IP.

Ethnography has the advantage of being able to generate rich data and insights (often 'hidden' from public gaze) and capture and explain holistically such data. Understanding is generated from immersion in the way of life researched (Hoey, 2011). For Malinowski (as cited in Packer, 2011), the final goal of ethnography is not to just grasp the inner meaning of participants' points of view, but to turn such knowledge into wisdom. This is expressed beautifully by Hammersley and Atkinson (1994, pp. 248-261):*"Our final goal is to enrich and deepen our world's vision, to understand our own nature and make it finer."* This

emphasises the importance of the researcher being both participant and detached observer, and the necessity of looking for patterns over time by not making decisions on isolated circumstances.

Through immersing myself in the participants' world, I was able to observe how practitioners applied their understandings in practical life, and also ascertain a consistency with what had been conveyed in the interview process. As the effect of a similar lifestyle and practices impacted on me, there were shifts in my own awareness and consciousness. The inner transformational process that took place within deepened my understanding beyond that of the intellect. For example, while meditating with one participant, my consciousness suddenly shifted, as if moving from one room to another. I was transported into a state where there was no thought, just awareness. It was a state more real than the world I had known before. Everything was radiant with light, and my being was flooded with a joy that lasted for several days. The experience touched my being in a very deep way. The attraction of worldly life fell away and an intense desire to touch that reality again arose.

From this experience, I was able to understand why this participant had been able to live for three years in a dark cave, covered in snow at temperatures below 40 degrees centigrade in the winter months. I understood the intense desire for realisation of the Self, described by many participants, and experienced the transformational benefit of being in the company of an advanced practitioner. This gave me a deeper perspective on the value of the guru/disciple relationship, and flowed through to the interpretative process in analysing and understanding the data being presented by participants.

The roles of the observed and the observer and the boundaries between them, is a critical issue in ethnography. A process of deep engagement and introspection is required. As an ethnographer, the study is not an external objective thing but intertwined with the researcher's personal process. The process itself becomes fundamental to the theory.

Reinharz (cited in Guba & Lincoln, 2008, pp. 255-286) argues that "*we not only bring the self to the field … [we also] create the self in the field*." The inner attention required is described by de Giudice (2007, pp. 9-19) as *"listening to and with one's heart"*, and is considered by her as being essential for allowing one's own experience to surface. This process affects consciousness and personal transformation for both parties. Gonzalee (cited by de Giudice, 2007) describes the practice of a 'spiritual ethnography' which involves the researcher engaging in a spiritual practice involving meditation, introspection and reflection. This is congruent with my own experience as described above.

Positionality of researcher in relation to the study

Having been a student of psychology, a psychotherapist and personal growth workshop leader, I had formed certain constructs around the mind and the self in relation to psychological theory. My experiences with yoga and meditation, and those from being a practitioner of Indian psychology for the last twenty-five years, led me to becoming interested in the process of Self-realisation and its relationship to psychology.

Through experiencing 'spiritual ethnography', it was clear to me that researching the process and manifestations of Self-realisation requires a depth of understanding that, in my process as a researcher, could not have been gathered except through an experiential pathway. Denzin and Lincoln (2005, pp. 1-32) assert that "*new tales from the field will now be written, and they will reflect the researcher's direct and personal engagement in this historical period*."

This research project has been, in no small measure, a process whereby the exchange of understandings (through the interviews) has uncovered a depth that could not have been experienced through an observation/objective research approach. It has led me to consider that the practice of IP by certain spiritual masters presents insights that could contribute valuable understandings for addressing modern psychological issues. In this study and practice of Indian psychology and spirituality, I have discovered significant psychological

insights contained in classical Indian wisdom, which present a practical pathway for personal and societal development. It is important to consider that my own experiences and beliefs are likely to have influenced both the nature of the research and the research process.

My study, therefore, adopts a heuristic perspective, one where I am deeply immersed in all stages of the research process. Patton (1990, p. 234) defines heuristics as *drawing " upon the intense personal experiences of the researcher…"* It has been emphasised by several researchers that both participants and the researcher need to have a passionate personal interest in the topic (West, 1998a, 1998b). In the data collection, I found much valuable information was gleaned when I participated in *satsang*[15].

The engagement of researchers requires them to begin with following what has called them from their own life experience, and then apply an *"unwavering and steady inward gaze"* to explore what engages their attention (Patton, 1990, p. 71). This was my experience in the process of developing this study. The heuristic process has been defined as having six stages: initial engagement with the topic, immersion in the field, incubation, illumination, explication and creative synthesis (Moustakas, 1990). Other writers have described a radical participatory or experiential methodology in terms analogous to the heuristic model outlined here: one that allows for more engaged, experiential and dialogic modes of discourse (Harner, 1999; Harvey, 2003; Turner, 2003). Radical participation implies that the researcher fully embodies the experiences in which he or she participates, both during their time in the field and afterwards, leading to integration and internalisation of those experiences.

In the course of collecting field data, I often spent many days or weeks with participants. One participant invited me to spend some time in two of his ashrams and then travel across southern India with him to spend three days at a special international celebration of the 80th

[15] An informal (often joyful and humorous) sharing as individuals mutually and intensely engaged in the spiritual process.

birthday of his guru. Due to the extremely busy schedules of several other gurus, I needed to spend a week to a month at their ashram in order gain a time slot for an interview. This meant I would participate in the daily activities and have the opportunity to often be in the company of the participant as they fulfilled all their public responsibilities and programmes. This meant that the depth and breadth of the material I was able to gain from some participants went beyond that I could have gleaned purely from being an interviewer.

Other participants live in isolated areas in the Himalayas. In order to gain access, I needed to also take up a simple life in a cave in the silence of the high mountains for some time. One participant, who lived at high altitude in a cave, was a *mouni*'[16]. I had to spend several weeks over three field trips to gain my 'interview' in writing. Every day I would meet with him and spend several hours meditating in his company before another question and answer session. He would also provide feedback on my own meditation practice.

Some would say that complete embodied participation is the only authentic way of studying spiritual practices, particularly those involving altered states of consciousness. Laughlin, McManus and Shearer (1993) note that an ethnocentric bias towards 'monophasic' or normal waking consciousness states inhibits experiential understandings of 'polyphasic' or higher consciousness realities. Only when the researcher enters altered states of reality, can they fully appreciate those states: "*for the monophasic fieldworker there exist severe constraints to vicarious participation in alternate phases of consciousness*" (p.190-195). It is essential that researchers adopt an experiential methodology when studying experiential spirituality, verification of which depends on personal insight (Wallis, 2000). Hiles (2001) emphasises, with a heuristic orientation, that extraordinary human experiences can be researched more closely through this process.

[16] Has taken a vow of silence

Research design

The research design has been framed around the extrinsic demands of validity and rigour, and the intrinsic positionality that I took due to experience and interest. The challenge for all qualitative research is how to best facilitate validity and objectivity, when all experience and knowledge are essentially personal and subjective. The question may be asked about the validity of subjective knowledge, but the observer phenomenon is always present to some degree (Packer, 2011). The empirical-analytic sciences attempts to avoid the paradox by leaving interpretation and focusing on measurement and logic (Taylor, 1971). Qualitative research, however, acknowledges the role of the observer/interviewer as one of active engagement in that which is sought to be understood.

Developing validity standards in qualitative research is challenging because of the necessity to incorporate rigour and subjectivity, along with creativity, into the scientific process. Following an extensive literature review of validity criteria, Whittemore, Chase and Mandle (2001) produced a synthesis, which represents a contemporary re-conceptualisation of debate and dialogue, emphasising the limitations of an over-reliance on process or, alternatively, the product of the research itself. They made a distinction between primary validity criteria such as credibility, authenticity, criticality and integrity, and secondary criteria such as explicitness, vividness, creativity, thoroughness, congruence and sensitivity.

The research design for this study attempted to include elements of both primary and secondary validity criteria, within a foundation of what is often deemed most important for a quality outcome: honest and forthright investigation (Marshall, 1990).

'From the self to the Self' involved a complex set of relationships between the participants and myself. It required interpretative work at many levels: digging deeper whilst conducting the interviews and ensuring that the analysis, whilst working with the material, contained

aspects of objectivity and subjectivity in terms of the interpretation. Reporting on the findings through my own interpretation became the window through which the participants were able to fully express their insights.

As the project progressed, it became clear that the hermeneutical theory of interpretation would be the most appropriate approach as it acknowledges the challenges of attempting to objectively study the subjective. It also fits with the heuristic orientation, as it implies that research should involve a dialogue between researcher and participant, in which the researcher draws on their preconceptions rather than trying to be rid of them. The researcher is always a partner in the dialogue. Habermas (1978, p. 179) describes it thus: "*The relation of observing subject and object is replaced by that of participant subject and partner.*"

The Hermeneutic Circle

Modern hermeneutics has been developed successively by Dilthey, Heidegger, Gadamer, Habermas and Ricoeur (Ramberg & Gjesdal, 2008). As part of the emergence of the qualitative research paradigm, this began to reach mainstream social sciences, including psychology. Influential evaluation textbooks, such as early editions of Patton (2001), began to include sections on hermeneutic-interpretive research; Packer and Addison's (1989) *Entering the Circle* marked the emergence of interest in hermeneutic methods in psychology.

Today, the interpretive-hermeneutic approach is one of the main perspectives on qualitative research, alongside grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and empirical phenomenology (Wertz, 1983). In spite of superficial differences in intellectual tradition and terminology, the three approaches overlap substantially with one another (McCleod, 2001). For example, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith & Osborne, 2003), as its name suggests, combines elements of hermeneutics and empirical phenomenology.

I utilised the hermeneutic circle in my research design because of its usefulness in exploring meaning (see Fig. 5). For this study, four circles are chosen to represent the four perspectives

that emerge from the findings: the senior participants, the disciple participants, the ancient textural information and the researcher (myself). These circles are placed within a larger circle, which represents the understanding of the process of Self-realisation (the whole). An important concept of the hermeneutical circle is the necessity to understand each part, in order to get a sense of the whole. The parts and the whole are mutually conditioned to gain a sense of what has been uncovered through the findings (Packer, 2011).

The hermeneutic circle operates between understanding and interpretation. Understanding is the pre-reflective comprehension of the subject matter. Interpretation is the development and articulation of this understanding. In the process of this articulation, understanding, inconsistencies and confusion among the four smaller circles became evident at times. In these instances, interpretation leads to modified understanding. As an example, one of the senior practitioners was adamant that realisation was a simple process that arises by following the path of *jnana* (knowledge) alone. This was not consistent with his behaviour or the stories he chose to share, which were full of devotion for his guru. This illustrated that, indeed, he was still immersed in the path of devotion, and I was able to discuss this further with him.

Once the findings were analysed, areas of concordance and discordance between the participants and the scriptural description were identified.

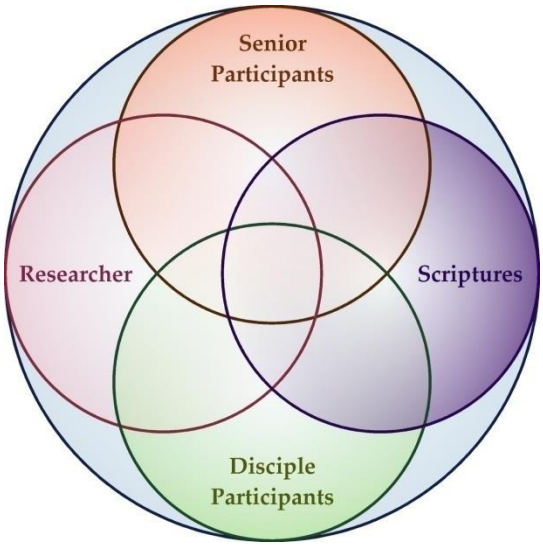

Fig. 5: The Hermeneutic Circle as relating to the study of spiritual practitioners and their practices

The Hermeneutic Spiral

The hermeneutic spiral represents the spiralling process of interpretation I utilised, where the interpretations of individuals within a group build on each other's understanding over time (see Fig. 6). This shows how the research process had time to grow and include a method of interpretation that was built over time through comparison and feedback.

1. Participant narratives and observations. Typed transcriptions. Preliminary interpretation. Tentative themes compiled.
2. In depth interpretation
3. Scriptural comparison
4. Paradigm shift from knowing 'that' to knowing 'how'
5. Reflection on findings with participants to determine consistency of meanings, knowledge and values
6. Development of *Theory* based on findings

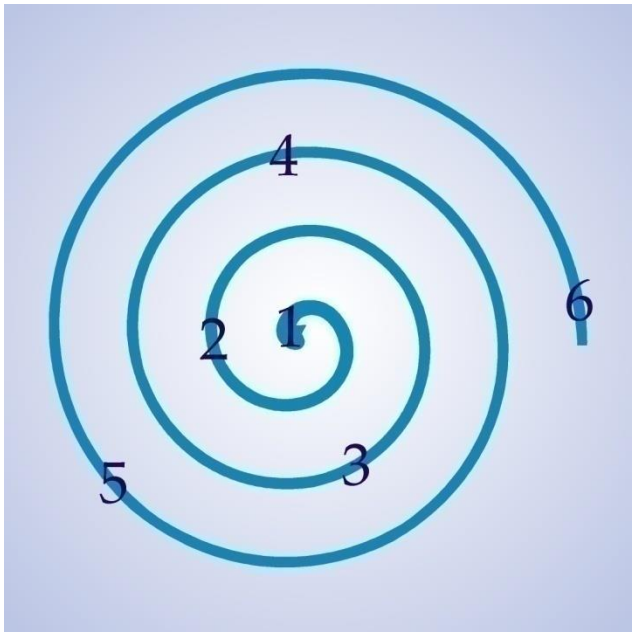

Fig 6: The hermeneutical spiral as relating to the research process

These two aspects of the hermeneutical framework enabled me to bring to light the hidden experiential features that might have been overlooked in a purely descriptive approach. They contributed to the consistency between philosophy, design, pathways, research intentions and outcomes. It was important to use data-generation methods that were sensitive to the Indian culture and flexible, rather than rigidly standardised or structured, or entirely abstracted from the real life context of the participants. Hermeneutical phenomenology, within a constructivist and semi-participatory framework, appeared to be the most consistent with the culture of spirituality. Such an approach is increasingly seen as a valuable one in psychology,

where methodology is seen to be inevitably interwoven with and emerging from the nature of psychology itself (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Analytic method

The qualitative method employs a variety of data collection strategies but central to the methodology is thematic analysis whereby overt and covert meaning is extracted through the identification of common themes that provide insights into the significance of the data (Creswell, 1998). I used a mixture of coding, interpretative phenomenological analysis and triangulation (Packer, 2011) as this approach had the potential to match the complexity of Indian thought in relation to the individual and society. Such a holistic approach, incorporated critical questioning, my own experiences, data from the transcripts, and observation. In this way, hermeneutical aspects influenced the analytic method. Merriam (2009) defines the issue when describing quality data analysis as a complex process that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concept, between inductive and deductive reasoning, description and interpretation. For example, one participant who is an Ayurvedic doctor, discussed the abstract concept 'God is love'. He followed this statement with the observation that it gave him great pleasure to serve God in all his patients (concrete expression). This type of finding is typically found in the hermeneutic approach where a theme has both an abstract conceptual idea and a concrete expression (Naidu & Pande, 1990).

Thematic analysis and coding

Utilising a conventional coding system, which has been identified as useful for analysing phenomenological aspects of qualitative research (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), allowed for the data to be utilised in the development of theory without pre-conception. It also allowed me to ground the interpretation within the data, ensuring a degree of rigour that might otherwise be perceived to be missing from a purely interpretative approach. The coding was accomplished

through the practices of abstraction and generalization, such as exemplified in grounded theory (Packer, 2011).

I initially went through each transcription several times to build up a picture of the emerging themes, as well as the process of Self-realisation as a whole, which was followed by a synopsis of each participant's process in the journey to Self-realisation. This noted key aspects, but also provided an integrated overview for each individual. Using an iterative process, I returned to the transcripts and colour-coded for key themes, breaking the text down into segments. As each subsequent transcription was coded, new codes were added for each new key theme until saturation point was reached (Saldana, 2009). Through this rigorous process I attempted to ensure justice to the process of Self-realization, as well as the elements that made up that process.

It was a significant challenge to decide how to break up the story of the process, due to the overlapping and interwoven nature of each element. Not only did every element interweave in seemingly infinite ways, but they spanned a continuum from the gross to the subtle, or lower to higher levels of consciousness, expressing itself in a different ways at different stages. For example, many of the practices taken up by a novice in order to facilitate their progress were the same as the practices that spontaneously arose in the enlightened. This meant that any one element could not necessarily be viewed solely as being at any particular point on the continuum of Self-realisation.

I initiated coding with no preconceptions, fully open to what themes would arise. Coding of the raw data occurred in conjunction with constant comparative coding and questioning, along with a continuous reflection on the underlying patterns or emerging concepts. These were then assessed for relevance. Each emerging concept was questioned in an impartial and detached way to discover its relevance to the research topic, and whether it was a core theme or sub-theme. Once I had completed the coding process, I discovered the connecting

relationship between the relevant themes and sub-themes and integrated them into a holistic framework of the process of Self-realisation. Whilst this is a similar approach to grounded theory, where the researcher continuously fits the relevant raw data into a workable concept through integration, comparison and questioning (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), my process was perhaps not as exhaustive as some of those that others have utilised. Strauss's approach to grounded theory emphasized the value of micro-analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) . I considered his approach would not enable either the focus or the contextual framework within I was working to relate to the data in a meaningful way (Allan, 2003)

I attempted to ensure data was relevant and fitted within the emergent themes. If any data was not relevant to the research topic, it did not qualify for coding. It was not until the completion of thematic analysis that relevant findings were compared to the process of Self-realisation described in the *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad Gita*. Throughout the process I implemented the inductive and comparative nature of qualitative research and the relatively flexible and on-going iterative process of simultaneous data collection and analysis. This was necessary to answer the research question (see pg 7) through comparison and coding, and to develop theory and, finally, visual representations.

All participants were offered the opportunity to receive a copy of their transcript, which was sent to all who requested it for comment and validation. Those who requested a draft of the research findings were sent them, to ensure the generated theory was consistent with their experience, and in this way to provide some validity of the research outcome.

Participants are identified with numbers and letters only in order to ensure complete anonymity, as required by the ethics committee. However, none of the participants wanted this anonymity. This suggests that their egos have been sublimated to the processes they are undergoing and the experience of a greater Self. There was nothing that needed to be 'protected'. This could also be related to the fact that many considered that their life was

lived primarily for the benefit of others. Several of the senior practitioners were not keen to spend time providing an interview if the information was not going to be made available to seekers who could benefit. Two requested that I allow the interview to be filmed so it could be of wider benefit.

How participants have been identified in the study

All participants were given a unique identifier, utilising the following strategy:

- Senior practitioners were identified G1 to 13.
- Disciples were coded D1 to 14.
- Lineages or traditions were identified.
- Nationalities were stated.

Quotes from participants were selected on the basis of their ability to express relevant concepts clearly and are generally representative of many participants' views.

Rigour and validity

Throughout the process, rigour was at the forefront in my approach. Morse (1994, p. 185) argues: *"a good qualitative inquiry must be verified reflexively in each step of the analysis ... qualitative inquiry, properly conducted is self-correcting and rigorous, and the results are strong*." Classically, qualitative studies aim to represent phenomenological reality rather than to find out the truth: "*We are concerned not with measurement, but with description and meaning, hence reliability and validity take on a different role* ." (p.185)

Conversely, Lincoln and Guba (2000) prescribe concepts such as credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability of study findings as more relevant measures in the context of in-depth research. The following elements in my research design are in support of achieving these measures of rigour.

Systematic study design

(Guion, 2002) emphasises that rigour requires a formal framework for guiding the collection and analysis of the research data. To fulfil this requirement and keep the study on track, I commenced with a systematic study design which included a plan for this process.

Establishing rapport

Being immersed in the field of Indian spirituality for over twenty years and also previously spending time with some of the participants, which developed familiarity, made it easy to establish an affinity with them. This accords with the idea that quality data emerges from rapport and empathy (Partington, 2001). In some instances, such rapport helped to offset the Indian cultural prohibition of personal response to direct questioning.

Variety of perspectives

I took care to select participants from not only different lineages and traditions, both senior practitioners and disciples, but also both men and women of Indian and Western backgrounds from a variety of locations across India. This added significantly to the comprehensiveness of the data collection. Their combined views present a balanced perspective. In order to accurately portray the complexity of reality, it is necessary to gather contradictory or overlapping perceptions and nuanced understandings that different individuals hold (Herbert & Rubin, 2005). Utilising participants from a range of paths and backgrounds also meant that they collectively provided a range of experts in different facets of the field. Within their collective wisdom, different facets of the process of Self-realisation could be explored in depth and I was able to gain complementary understandings from differing perspectives.

Validation of emerging theories

I was fortunate to be able to stagger the data collection over eighteen months and three trips to India, each of up to three months in duration. Nakkeeran and Zodpe (2012) discuss the usefulness of staggering and processing data collection over as long a period as possible. This

supports the iterative and inductive process. I maintained a concurrent interviewing, transcribing and analytic process over this period of data collection. It enabled me to reflect on the nature of the data, as well as check the integrity of the data collection process, before beginning another set of interviews. It also assisted in an understanding of the material, by allowing a deeper exploration of the emergent themes which could then frame the later interviews.

One participant cast an entirely new light on the process of Self-realisation, relating it to the cutting edge of evolution in a creative way. He experienced that realisation of the Self, described by other participants as mergence with undifferentiated consciousness, was only half the picture. For him, Self-realisation equated with also becoming the cutting edge of the evolutionary impulse in the universe. Armed with this information, in a later interview, I was able to discuss this (seemingly) radical viewpoint with a *Shankaracharya*[17]. He validated the experience and also confirmed that it is discussed in the *Upanishads*. Such a process allowed for a natural evolution of the data-collection process.

Enhancing credibility of data

I selected participants who were experienced, knowledgeable and respected in the area of Indian spirituality. Of the Western participants, all but one were permanent residents of India, having been based there for between fifteen and forty years. Their many years of relevant, first-hand experience of being immersed in Indian spirituality, enabled them to speak with authority about both the personal process and the broader cultural and spiritual context. The importance of utilising such 'encultured informants', individuals who know the culture well and take it as their responsibility to explain what it means, is a critical factor in establishing the validity of both the process and the resulting information (Spradley, 1979).

[17] The four *Shankaracharyas* are, in India, equivalent to the Pope in Christianity.

Validation of data

Through the process of sending copies of their transcripts to as many participants as possible, I validated my account of each participant's experience. I received no feedback of inaccuracy. Any significant difference between my account and that of participants would have been considered new original data and incorporated into the findings. This contributed to meeting the requirement of dependability and credibility, so important in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, pp. 163-188).

Observation

Information obtained by observation is often considered to be more valid than that obtained through the interview process (Patton, 1990). As I immersed myself in the world of the participants for a considerable period of time, I was able to collect much data that created a richer tapestry about each participant's process. I was also able to check whether some of my observations were repeated. This revealed both consistencies and inconsistencies, which could be further discussed with the participant, and then incorporated into the analytic process.

With a number of participants, I experienced first-hand the unstoppable drive for spontaneous selfless service, whether or not they overtly confessed to any such activity in the initial interview. Whilst in the field, lying in a cave at high altitude with an infected foot and no fresh food supplies and no one having been informed of my predicament, one of the participants who lived in the vicinity travelled 20 kilometres down to the nearest town, crossing a dangerous glacier, to bring me not only antibiotics, but fresh fruit and vegetables. Miraculously, these came from the first supply truck that had reached the remote Himalayan area in a month.

He also brought back my favourite food for the mountains – paneer.[18] Each subsequent day he would lovingly prepare food in his own cave some distance away and bring it over at dusk. I repeatedly asked him not to, as I now had my own food supplies to use. His face would express his dismay and he would relay that it was all he had to give. In the interview process, this participant expressed feelings of guilt, as being on the path of meditation in a remote region limited his practical service to humanity.

This was one of many examples of experiencing outpourings of love from participants who did not verbally express this aspect in their initial interview. But through my observation, I discerned that it was inherent in their way of life. How did this young swami know what my needs were?

As I continued to observe 'miracles' around participants, I was forced to question the nature of the spiritual process more deeply. One participant had expressed to me that *brinjal* (eggplant) was her favourite vegetable. The next day I happened to observe a young man crossing the snow-covered plains with a large bag of fresh *brinjal* (currently out of season) to bring to the renunciate. This situation seemed to also cross the barrier of time, as the boy had come from a village two days away and would have left before she even expressed her love for this vegetable.

On this participant later being questioned, she expressed her need to be extremely careful with her thoughts, as anything she desired seemed to appear. Phenomenally, her needs were still always being met and the door of her cave was always being graced with provisions. These were always the goods that she needed at that time.

I got to see, first-hand, many examples of the way that the lives of those who have truly surrendered to God are supported and protected, regardless of whether they were fully realised or not. These participants were not the leaders of large ashrams, with many

[18] Indian cheese

followers; they were humble, hermit-like seekers, living far from the crowds, living simple lives dedicated to the process of Self-realisation. Such ethnographic, first-hand observation is regarded to be a necessary aspect in the scientific study of cultures (Best, 2010; Packer, 2011). The importance of observation is emphasised as a valid means of confirming emergent themes or contradicting the verbal data, giving greater depth to my understanding of the nature and difficulties of the path.

For example, during the data collection phase, a highly-respected senior practitioner talked very proficiently about the ease of gaining Self-realisation and described his realised state as one of a mature, objective person, no longer a victim of the mind or emotions. Soon after, he was forced to resign as a trustee of his large organisation with its many international activities, because of sexual indiscretion. However, in spite of losing his status and position as head of many ashrams, attachment still seemed to be an issue, as it was reported that he retained his status as a swami! Could this have been a reflection of his pride and ego? Maybe. He did, however, move into seclusion to intensify his practice, thus showing some awareness and understanding of the spiritual practice he still needed to undertake.

This observed incident contradicted much of what he relayed in the interview process and validated the view of the majority of participants that, although Self-realisation is possible, attaining it contains many traps and pitfalls. The path is truly, as several termed it, *'a razor-edged path'*. I had observed, first hand, the power of certain tendencies (*vasannas*) and the difficulty of overcoming desire that still challenge an advanced practitioner. This caused me to explore more deeply the nature of Self-realisation and to question whether, indeed, other participants, who also professed to having attained this state, were either self-deluded or not speaking fully from their truth. In effect, this further information allowed for greater triangulation of data, enabling the conclusions to be more rooted in reality (either subjective or objective).

Triangulation

This is an important tool for corroborating findings and testing for validity (Patton, 1990). I used triangulation to ensure my findings would be rich, robust, comprehensive and well developed. The information was collected and compared, and inconsistencies noted. Validation of the findings was gained through cross verification of the data received from practitioners (both novice and senior, from multiple lineages, paths and backgrounds); semi-structured interviews; observation (which could lead to further questioning);and scriptural comparison. This assisted in creating worthwhile and useful material. It was also a way of overcoming weaknesses or intrinsic biases and problems that might come from a single method, and provided a broader understanding of the subject matter. It also provided a measure of transparency to the process.

Transparency

A core principal of quality in qualitative research is transparency (Meyrick, 2006; Yardly, 2011). To ensure this, I have included a clear statement of my position as a researcher and information regarding the characteristics of the participants. Descriptions of a wide range of experiences are included. This allows the findings to be judged according to their own standards. See Appendix A for participant profile**s.** This also impacts on the transferability (or otherwise) of the findings.

Transferability

Transferability is an important component of qualitative methodology (Searle, 1999) but is controversial. The degree to which this study could be replicable depends on the clarity and transparency of the assumptions that have been made. In the findings as well as the discussion, these assumptions are clearly identified and the reasons for making them are explained. This study has important implications for the practice of psychology. The transferability of the findings into a psychological framework would depend on a number of

critical factors, including the openness of both the practitioner and the client to the processes identified.

Strengths, challenges and weaknesses of the research design

Strengths

The chosen research design enabled me to collect rich data, often in great detail, from different perspectives, which provided an in-depth understanding of the subject. This is often termed 'thick description' in qualitative research (Holloway & Wheeler, 2010).To enable greater insight, I have utilised the actual words of the participants, thus allowing for an understanding that goes beyond the intellectual into the reality of their lives.

The strength of the methodology employed lies in the fact that it has a holistic focus, enabling the attainment of a deeper, more valid understanding of the subject than could be achieved through a more rigid approach. It allowed participants to speak for themselves and raise topics which I might not have included in a more structured research design. This adds to the quality of the data collected. One participant linked her process of Self-realisation to health and healing in a manner that enables understanding of the multiple levels and applications of this phenomenon. Another linked his experience of 'enlightenment' with the works of modern physicists and biologists in a way which enabled me to see the process of Self-realisation in an evolutionary context.

A strength of qualitative research is the fact that there are fewer threats to external validity, because subjects are studied in their natural setting and encounter fewer controlling factors compared with quantitative research conditions (Sandelowski, 1986). I became so immersed in the context and the subjective states of the participants that I am confident that the data is representative of the subject being studied. However, I had to also be conscious of

maintaining enough of the 'objective observer' stance required to describe or interpret participants' experiences and my own in a meaningful way.

Challenges

The time required for data collection, transcribing, analysis and interpretation was significant. It took three separate trips, totalling over five months, to collect all the data in India. Extensive travel across India was required. When I finally completed the interviewing phase, careful organisation was needed to deal with the considerable amount of data collected.

The biggest challenge was in obtaining interview time with prominent leaders, who have extremely demanding schedules. They often ran multiple international centres, large service projects across India and abroad and teaching institutions, and had daily responsibilities for multitudes of devotees. Commonly, the interview was shortened due to clusters of pressing devotees seeking attention. These delays were not always anticipated. In several instances, after much travel, ongoing promises for the interview and further waiting while more pressing matters took precedence, I was unable to remain long enough and had to leave empty handed. I was unable to include three of my selected senior participants for this reason.

Weaknesses

The potential for bias

The study, being a mix of data collection through interview and observation, is open to the possibility of bias. Qualitative methodology, particularly within an ethnographic framework, whilst gaining depth, richness and 'thickness' through immersion in the lifestyle of the participants, also has the potential to distort the findings (i.e. present the participant's lifestyles in a positive light, etc.). The reliability of qualitative research can also be weakened by the issue of under-standardisation of process, relying on the insights and abilities of the observer, thus making an assessment of reliability difficult (Duffy, 1985).

Some researchers have concerns that qualitative research can potentially be skewed due to the aims and objectives of the researcher who interprets and analyses collected data through their own constructs and perspectives, which could differ considerably from that of the participants (Hill et al., 2005; Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, & Alexander, 1990). For this reason, I was careful not to infer any preconceptions concerning the participants' experiences and allow the themes to evolve during the theory-building process. However, I acknowledge that bias may still be present.

The potential for inaccuracy

It has been found that first-hand accounts of events are often partially inaccurate, especially personal recall from a historic perspective (Monette, Sullivan, & Jong, 1994). These authors concluded that, for this reason, in-depth interviews are less valid when compared to other techniques such as observation, where findings are recorded as they occur. There was often historical data in my interview material, as participants relayed experiences going back decades, and I was only able to confirm some aspects of the general data through observation, due to the limited time of the study.

The difficulty of 'personalisation' as a reflection of a high level of consciousness

For many participants, 'experience' is not equated with realisation, neither is much attention placed on the individual self, as there is progression into higher states of awareness and consciousness. This posed challenges in drawing out the data sought. For some participants, deeply immersed in a state of consciousness where 'There is Only God', it was difficult to draw to earlier stages in their development.

The difficulty of 'personalisation' as a reflection of culture

Due to cultural issues, there were also challenges in obtaining information on personal process from participants of Indian ethnicity. Renunciates take vows not to disclose personal

spiritual experience. This meant that the process was often discussed in less personal terms, although frequently it was clear discussions were linked to personal experience.

The truth, the whole truth or just a probable truth

Thorne (1997) suggests that the findings of qualitative research are only probable truths, and should only be acknowledged as a valuable contribution to further understanding of the research area. As Morse (1994, p. 185) states: *"The emerged theory is not reality but a representation of reality."* It is the researcher who has discovered, interpreted and connected the collective experiences of the participants. For this reason I sought some participants' approval and feedback on the final draft, to ensure that the emergent theory was relative to their personal experiences.

Research process

Criteria for participation

The participants were selected from a range of twelve spiritual lineages (traditions) in order to see whether the process of Self-realisation was common across a diversity of orientations. IP is analogous to a tree with many branches but one tap root, which is rooted in Vedic philosophy. It has survived over 5,000 years, adapting itself to the challenges of changing times. Its branches expand out into multiple directions, embracing a wide range of philosophical and religious ideas and practices. However the trunk, the essence, (called *Santana Dharma* – eternal wisdom) is the unifying core. This is the concept that the truth is One and can be directly experienced (Frawley, 2003). I specifically attempted to limit the number of participants from any particular tradition and included a wide range. This was to ensure the findings are not confined to any particular path.

Senior spiritual practitioners (gurus) were selected on the basis of the following characteristics. They would have been renunciates (or equivalent) for thirty years or longer as well as being respected leaders in Indian spirituality/psychology. They would generally

exhibit deep scholarship, have students or disciples, and would have made a significant contribution to society through service projects in any or all of the following areas: education, health, social welfare and environment.

Senior disciples were all well regarded by their lineage and had at least ten years as a renunciate or equivalent.

All participants were fluent in English, the language in which the interviews were conducted. The average length of the interviews was around one and a half hours. They ranged from half an hour to more than two hours. Participants were only interviewed once; however several were visited a second or third time and supplementary material obtained. One participant was a *mouni*, meaning that due to having taken a vow of not speaking, the interview responses had to be given in writing. Due to the lengthy nature of this process, he was visited for a week or more on three occasions.

I attempted to include not just Indians but also participants originally from the West, both men and women. There were notable differences in the quality of material gained between those of Western origins and those from India. In general, Westerners had a capacity to describe their experiences and processes in depth, whereas for Indians this was not culturally acceptable. This made the inclusion of Western practitioners invaluable in gaining in-depth information that relates to the context of WP. It took considerably more effort to glean the information I wanted from the Indian participants because of the cultural taboo against talking about personal experiences. Teachers who had experienced exposure to the West were more receptive than those who had not. Younger participants, who have a stronger Western influence in their educational process, were also more open in general than older participants.

As well, I noted the reluctance of some Indian participants to be real about their experiences and, in some case, had to make much more effort to get to the reality of their lives. Some of

the gurus were not interested in what they saw as a superficial conversation; they were much more interested in serving the spiritual practice of students and only wanted genuine questions that pertained to my own practice. In these instances I felt I had to 'prove' that I was a sincere practitioner. At times this also had to be demonstrated to disciples in order to be able to secure an audience with their teacher.

From the older Indian gurus I was often the recipient of a 'discourse', and social etiquette made it unacceptable to interrupt and steer the interview in the direction of the interview schedule. By the time the discourse was concluded they were keen to finish, due to time constraints.

The easiest interviews to conduct were with other women. Without exception, they were happy to share their personal experiences with another woman, especially when it was clear we were both on the 'path'. Often these interviews became a joyous sharing of the delights and challenges of the spiritual journey. It took a lot more effort to secure an interview with a male participant.

There was no noticeable difference between the experience of men and woman.

The gender, ethnicity, age and qualifications of participants are laid out in Appendix A.

Contact and recruitment

Two participants were initially contacted by email and forwarded an introductory letter. (See Appendix 3).The rest were given the introductory letter and explanation at the first meeting. Ten were contacted through their organisations. Fifteen were contacted in person (three of whom were present at an International Yoga Conference I was attending at a large ashram). Two were arranged by other participants.

A number of proposed participants were unavailable for interview due to pressing responsibilities, two were gained by referrals by people met in the research process, and

others I had either heard of or met during previous trips to India. This could be termed a combination of purposive, snowball and convenience sampling (Patton, 1990)

Informed consent

Prior to the commencement of the interviews, the participants were told that they had complete control over the interview setting and process. I informed them of their rights to terminate the interview at any time, to not answer any questions they did not want to answer, and to withdraw from participation if they so chose to. At the beginning of the interview a request was made to sign the consent form.

Two senior gurus declined to sign this form. One of these wanted assurance that all participants were traditional teachers of Vedanta. The other was very suspicious of signing anything. He proceeded to give a discourse, and then turned me away without answering any further questions or signing the form. A third potential participant signed the consent form but rushed away from the interview early when it became clear that he did not have the depth of knowledge or experience to answer the questions. I noted that this potential participant was engaged in running a yoga business with a profit motive, unusual for an ordained monk.

The interview setting

There was a wide variety of settings in which the interviews were conducted.

	Ashram	Kutir	Yoga Festival	Yoga School	Cave dwelling	Car journey to spiritual celebration	Ayurvedic Clinic	Retreat Centre
Senior Practitioner	4	2	3		1	1		2
Disciple	10	1		1	1		1	

Table 1: Interview Settings

Ethical considerations

Approval of this research was gained through a review of the Ethics Committee at Victoria University of Wellington. Singleton, Straits & Straits (1993) recommend three areas which

require the ethical consideration of the researcher. Firstly, the ethics of the researcher in relation to the research participants (e.g. issues such as confidentiality, informed consent and debriefing standards); secondly, the ethics used during the collection and analysis of the data (e.g. sensitivity to material, coding and data analysis and standards of evaluation); and finally the ethical responsibility to society (e.g. bicultural issues). If these are all followed, the researcher can avoid any unethical implications concerning a study.

Throughout the data collection, selection, coding, analysis and reporting procedures I used these ethical guidelines. I have reported all research findings, including those of an ambiguous or negative nature. I attempted as much as possible to ensure that data was not misrepresented, by continuously endorsing comparative methods while collecting data.

I also honoured and respected participants' rights by avoiding any deception, coercion or bias. As mentioned, each participant read and signed a consent form (Appendix D) at the completion of their interview. They were informed of their right to anonymity and have been provided with this in spite of the fact that they did not request it. The right to withdraw from the study at any stage was re-iterated at the completion of each interview. I was also vigilant in ensuring my dress and behaviour were culturally appropriate at all times.

Storage

Data was stored on cassette tapes in a locked safe at an educational institution and consigned to electronic storage during transcription. Identifying features were removed from the tapes and transcripts.

4. Findings

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from twenty-seven participants from a range of fifteen different spiritual traditions. These individuals included thirteen gurus or respected senior teachers and fourteen disciples. I instigated this study to explore the process of Self-realisation in modern-day practitioners across a broad range of spiritual traditions, and to find out whether this aligned with the process of Self-realisation in the ancient Vedic scriptures. Throughout this enquiry, I had the intention of gaining a broad yet in-depth insight into the process of Self-realisation and the major steps and challenges on the way.

Spirituality is often referred to as a path. Does the path have a beginning and an end? What are the most significant steps in following the path of Self-realisation? Is there a natural progression? Are there multiple paths or just one? If spiritual life is really a journey, then these are all important questions. This chapter describes the seven major themes that were most prominent in the findings and a number of sub-themes. These, in total, provide a broad understanding of both the process as a whole and also the important elements of the journey to Self-realisation.

Relationship with participants as a cultural phenomenon

My experience in the field reflected significant cultural differences between the West and the East, some of which are described in the methodology. While in the West emphasis is placed on protecting privacy, in India even the concept of personal space appears non-existent. As one participant said, describing her adjustment to the discomfort at the lack of privacy and physical or emotional space: *"After living in India for nearly 15 years I have realized that there is absolutely no concept of social space the way we understand it in the West."* (D6)

This lack of conceptual space seems to have engendered a sense of togetherness. The concept of *Vasudeva Kutumbakan* – the whole world is one family – is central to Indian

thought (Klostermaier, 2002). I was commonly addressed as 'Mother' or 'Aunty' and observed others also addressed as 'Brother,' 'Sister,' or 'Uncle.' Throughout the study, this concept manifested itself in the statements of many of the participants:

'*There is no differentiation between myself and others; all become one's loved ones."* (G7)

"When I am immersed in the consciousness that is the Self, I see it everywhere." (G9)

The emergent themes

As far as possible, I attempted to reduce the impact of my preconceptions that might have created a bias in the research findings.

The raw data from interviews was analysed by continuous comparison, questioning and integration of the emergent code, similar to the grounded theory qualitative model of research described by Glaser and Strauss (1967), but not as exhaustive. Concepts that emerged from the coding were grouped into major themes, each of which had an emergent series of sub-themes, allowing for depth of meaning. Constant comparison and questioning formed a significant part of the integration process. Quotes to illustrate each of the themes are predominantly selected on the basis of clarity, scope and representativeness.

The emergent themes were:

1. There is a need for ego transcendence
2. Desire and attachment are the root causes of unhappiness
3. Mental and emotional self-mastery are essential attributes
4. Character and values are the basis for spiritual life
5. Spiritual practices are essential to the process of Self-realisation
6. A teacher is necessity to the process
7. Realisation is constant integrated awareness

Theme 1: There is a need for ego transcendence

Without exception, participants view the ego as the largest barrier preventing progress on the path to realisation. They all emphasised the necessity of uprooting the need to cling to a false and separate sense of self as an essential initial step. Within this general theme, several sub-themes have emerged that add a depth and breadth of meaning to the overall process of ego transcendence.

It is clear from comments that the ability to recognise the faces of the ego, and to see them for what they actually are, is essential for progress on the path. The ego is seen to be responsible for greed, lack of empathy and anger and to be the foundation of all the obstacles which prevent progress toward realisation:

> *"The human face of that ego is pride, is arrogant self-importance, is narcissistic self-infatuation, is the need to see oneself as being separate at all times, in all places, through all circumstances – and that ego is the unrelenting enemy of all that is truly wholesome in the human experience. When this ego is unmasked, seen directly for what it is, finally unobscured by the other expressions of the personality, one finds oneself face-to-face with a demon – a demon that thrives on power, domination, control and separation, that cares only about itself and is willing to destroy anything and everything that is good and true in order to survive intact and always in control. This demon lacks any capacity for empathy, compassion, generosity or love, delights in its perfect invulnerability."* (G1)

It became very clear in the study that the way in which we understand and relate to the ego has everything to do with progress on the path.

> *"How I relate to the ego colours and informs every choice I make on the spiritual pat–h – what to accept, what to reject, when to move forward and when to step back. And it is*

those choices that ultimately determined the results of my efforts for enlightenment. When I was able to transcend the ego I began to live in perpetual bliss." (G1)

As participants work to eliminate and escape from the confines of their identification with the ego self, they achieve states described as: *"... 'happiness', 'joy', 'peace', 'freedom from attachment', 'freedom from suffering' and 'psychological health'."* (Various participants)

Transcendence in some cases is described as equating with *"Moment to moment awareness of the ego."* (D1). Such transcendence enables them to stand back and observe that their lives operate from various levels of the self. From this vantage point they have the ability to make discriminating choices in their actions.

Whether or not the understanding deepens depends on where allegiance lies. Is it with the narcissistic ego, or is it with the Self? The perspective of the individual who has surrendered the will of their ego to the Self is very different from the perspective of one who has not. What does it mean to surrender the will of the ego? As one participant puts it:

"I endeavoured with all my being to purify myself from any and every attachment, gross and subtle, to the narcissistic ego, that false individuality that masquerades as my own Self and whose task it is to keep me, at all costs, separate from my own heart." (D4)

The seat of the ego is considered to be the mind. However, participants find that as the ego is subtler than the mind, the mind itself cannot overcome it. Therefore ego transcendence is described as being full of challenges and open to the wily machinations that arise from the relationship between the mind and the ego. From one Western teacher's perspective, the challenge of guiding students through ego transcendence is often significant and daunting:

"When I began teaching the path to liberation fourteen years ago, I had no idea of the magnitude of the battle I had taken on by daring to lead others to the yonder shore ...

Blindness of the eyes is bearable and can be managed. You can still have a loving and compassionate heart. But when you are blinded by the ego, you are in complete darkness." (G1)

Many of the teachers emphasise the importance of not allowing ego to develop in their disciples. In order to check the growth of pride, they will at times appear to act in a cruel manner. As one disciple explained:

"People who see the blacksmith forging a hot piece of iron with his hammer may think that he is a cruel person. The iron piece may also think that he is cruel. But while dealing his blows, the blacksmith is only thinking of the result. The real guru is also like the blacksmith." (D1)

All but two participants comment that it is only through following the instructions of such a guru, who is established in the supreme experience of the Self, that the ego can finally be conquered:

"If you wish to know the Self, you have to eliminate the ego by surrendering to your guru with humility and surrender. When we lower our heads in humility, we are avoiding the dangers of the ego and thus allowing the Self to be awakened." (G2)

"He (my guru) has been the circuit breaker of my 'ego-current'." (D1)

One participant, G7, tells the story of when she had tried to hand feed her guru sweets in front of some important visitors (in order to impress them how important she was). He jumped back, as if he was being offered a lump of excrement, and wrinkled his nose. The disciple was embarrassed and furious to have been made a fool of in front of others and spent that night crying in shame. The next day, more visitors dropped some oranges by the side of the guru, who then asked the participant to feed him. When she stated that he didn't eat from her hand, he replied: *"I can eat love, but I can't eat pride"*.

I heard many other stories of gurus who utilised everyday circumstances to bring about awareness of the ego and, in this way, generate transformation in the student. This essential role of a teacher is discussed in more depth in Theme Four.

For all participants, the usual egoistic state of consciousness begins to eventually be seen as a 'dream' (*maya*). It is recognised as being essentially unreal, as an illusion which has no existence of its own. Some participants expressed that their observations during meditation or self-enquiry reveal that there is no abiding ego, just patterns of successive thought.

> *"I discovered that the mind creates the sense of ego. It is unreal."* (D16)

> *"When I stopped supporting the ego, it withdrew and disappeared. We ourselves lend the unreal ego its reality. Expose it for what it is, or rather, for what it isn't, and that will be the end of it."* (G1)

> *"Due to our ignorance, we believe we are bound by the ego, when in fact we are completely free."* (G2)

This understanding enables participants to expand their identity to become all-encompassing and include others, humanity at large and, for some, everything in creation. For nine participants, everything begins to be viewed as an extension of the Self. This broader state of consciousness is described as being beyond duality:

> *"I don't feel any differentiation anymore; all have become my loved ones. I feel like everybody is related to me in some way, like whether it's an animal, whether it's someone I'm meeting on the bus."* (G7)

> *"I experience a state beyond happiness and unhappiness where I am present everywhere – in everyone."* (D5)

"Automatically happiness comes because everywhere is happiness; because you see water loves you – you love water, sun loves you – you love sun; all is connected with your body." (G6)

With the disappearance of the ego, one comes to identify with the larger Self. Identification with the mind and emotions, personal desires and attachments, roles and personalities diminishes.

Sub-theme: there is a need for dis-identification with the personalities and roles of the ego self

All of the participants acknowledge the distinction between the Self (and the bliss which is associated with identifying with their fundamental nature) and the many personalities and identities of the ego self. Consistent with Vedantic thought, there is a common understanding that if we do not know ourselves as the inner supreme Self or universal being (*Purusha*[19]) it is because we are identified with the outer nature (*Prakriti*[20]) and, in this state of identification, the real nature of one's being is hidden from view.

Participants therefore emphasise the process of differentiating between an identity based on role identification and one based on the true Self. They recognise that the dilemma of being bound up in attachments of the ego self provides a major obstacle for further growth and evolution. This finding supports Aurobindo's (1972) contention that, whereas the ordinary mind knows itself only as ego, the first beginning of real self-knowledge is when you feel separate from your thoughts and emotions and recognise there are many parts of one's being, many personalities, each acting on its own behalf and in its own way.

In most cases it was dissatisfaction with life that led participants to begin questioning about the nature of reality and embark on an exploration of the nature of the Self:

[19] The unchanging pure consciousness of the Self.
[20] An aspect of the Self which is beyond perception but responsible for a process of evolution that leads to creation. [outer nature?]

"I had notions I am the body', 'I am the mind', 'I am a teacher', etc., but I was not happy with these identities. I went to a teacher who told me that I was 'limitless supreme truth'. As the existing thought in me was 'I am limited, mortal, disturbed', I had to explore which of these two statements was true." (G8)

As one participant described the deepening of the process:

"In contemplation on the Self, you drop out of your dresses. It is like on a cold day you put on layers of clothes to protect yourself from the cold. But as the day gets warmer, you start disrobing and throwing away the coverings one after another. Exactly in the same way, when you start suffocating under the roles, you get rid of them one after the other. The roles continue to be there but you do not take yourself to be the roles. You can drop them whenever you want." (D9)

Another describes the process of transcending the ego self as one of uncovering her true nature by becoming:

"... less and less – thinner and thinner and thinner." (G7)

She said it had taken her a long time to understand the process was not about gaining 'more'. Seeing beyond the roles one has in life gives new insight into the deeper nature of the Self:

"Each of us is Brahman in reality, but we say 'I am the body', ' am the father.' That means 'I'is qualified by all these adjectives. Ultimately the word 'I' itself qualifies something which is neither 'I' nor the roles it takes. If I am with the very source, the substratum, the basis itself, then every role becomes just a description." (D13)

The process of dis-identification with the personalities of the ego is described by eight participants, in such a way as to make it seem simple:

"It is only because of identifying with the body/mind that I had not discovered my true self. It was not difficult to attain consciously as it already existed. It was as simple as

lighting a candle in a darkened room. In my self-enquiry of 'Who am I?', it was clear I was something more than the body, mind, intellect or the senses. In this enquiry, the individual identity was lost, the ego vanished and there was Self-realisation." (D7)

"My individual identity and consciousness merged with universal consciousness. The moment this occurred, realisation started revealing itself." (G4)

However, eleven others describe releasing the hold of ego identifications as extremely difficult, requiring great courage and perseverance. One participant (D1) likens the process to a 'fire' as he was forced to overcome layers of ignorance created by false concepts built by the intellect and a strong ego sense. He also likened the process to being in the 'repair shop' and involving comprehensive change. Another stated:

"When we look into a mirror we are supposed to see ourselves, but the mirror I saw was covered with dust and dirt and pollution, and that is all I saw – the dust and dirt and pollution of ignorance, misconceptions, desire, envy, anger, arrogance, greed and illusion. Through my mind I was identifying with all these things." (G11)

As this participant began to clean his mirror, he started to experience his true nature. When a practitioner becomes free of identification with the personality, he gains discrimination in the face of the temptations of the ego, and the understanding required to progress on the path grows.

"It is an inner blossoming that takes place – like a bud opening up. It is part of a slow but steady process." (D12)

Sub-theme: I am not the doer

The ego sees itself as a doer and identifies with the actions done by the body. However, as participants released the hold of ego-consciousness, the conviction arose that in reality it is the Self (God) through which everything is done:

"We are commanded by our inner soul." (D12)

"Everything other than the Self is predestined or as it will be." (D5)

Observing their lives carefully and contemplating on their experiences, they come to the conclusion that everything is in the hand of a 'cosmic choreographer' or subtle force which guides the destiny of all of creation:

"God alone is the doer, the body merely an instrument." (D1)

"You never feel yourself separated from the absolute and your body is like a flute." (G8)

Several participants explained how all the processes of nature occur automatically, without our conscious control:

"Everything is going on without your control. Can we control digestion? As we get closer to God, giving with no thought of return becomes automatic. Nature and God are not separate. If you give love for the sake of love, it has to come back. It is just like an echo." (G5)

For some, the whole world is viewed as a cosmic play:

"A movie directed and acted upon by God alone." (D7)

"He is the doer. If he is the doer, we are all puppets in his hands. He allows us to have little minute independence for desiring". (D11)

"He calls me to act here as a particular actor with a specified significant responsibility." (D14)

From this realisation, many participants experience the power of desire-less action:

"All is surrendered. You do your action, but in action there will be no attachment. All is surrendered and offered to the Lord." (G3)

Seeing oneself as an expression of God or the Self gives much pleasure:

"The flute is empty. It is hollow, so it adorns the lips of God whereon which he plays, giving us the melody of the divine song, song celestial. Our job is to empty ourselves, to be hollow, free from the ego, and allow ourselves to be played by him, with the tune he likes, the song that he prefers. Just allow and you will enjoy that things happen in a much better way than what you would have done all by yourself." (D7)

When there is identification with the ego self, attention is diverted for self-orientated and selfish motives and purposes and there is the experience of being the doer. However, when identification and perception shift to the realisation and understanding that 'I am not the doer', surrender of the limited ego to the higher Self takes place. This is an important step in making progress and was described by fourteen participants.

Realisation can be likened to a process of increasing freedom. At this point the seeker has become free of identification with various personalities and roles:

"Once there is a deep understanding that the unfoldment of events in our lives is not in our hands, there is no longer anything to do; the roots of desire and attachment die inside. When they have no roots in our being, then we're free – tremendously free." (G7)

With a new attitude towards life, the practitioner also becomes free from the results of actions, because they are done in a mode of surrender. Action is no longer binding. There is

no longer the seeking for the fruits of action. Such an individual surrenders the fruits of his actions for the sake of others. One participant, G7,, who is working tirelessly to build a large hospice, commented that she had no personal interest in the field of health or the success of the project. However, I observed she had given up all previous teaching activities, had stopped taking so many visitors to her ashram and had dedicated her life solely to the work. The need for the hospice had simply been presented to her, and there was no one else with the skills to create the resources needed to meet the needs of those dying of cancer, or their families.

Another participant (G4) had spent years in the US, following sincere and persistent requests for assistance in healing the immigrant communities and building a temple complex. He said he agreed on the condition that no one was to think that they were the ones building it. This was similar to the time when he had been requested to build pilgrim facilities at Mt Kailash in Tibet. He went into silent communion, going deep into the divinity within, until he got the 'green light', and then stated confidently, "*it will be done*", in spite of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. He explained: "*I simply knew that it would be completed by God's grace.*"

Such selfless action has two benefits: the fruits of action are not binding and the action becomes a form of worship. The Self-realised person goes on performing actions with a tranquil mind, and always remains free from the bondage of the action. For him, there is no self-interest. All his actions are motivated by selflessness and he is free:

> *"I am surrendered to God, so I go according to his wish and will. I am happy with what he does." (G5)*

Over the two years of the study, I came to see first-hand the miraculous development of a number of seemingly impossible projects, due to this attitude of surrender. D1 described how

the free super specialty hospital he had spent many years serving in as an anaesthetist was miraculously completed in only nine months, and is able to continue to provide free high-end facilities without any fund-raising. Another example is the success of the Ganga and Yamuna clean-up projects initiated by G4 which followed on from the failed attempts by the Indian government and numerous international environmental organisations.

Realisation of the Self is realisation of the undifferentiated consciousness of the Self (see Theme 5). In this awareness of the oneness of everything, there is no sense of a separate identity or identification as a separate doer. For all but three participants, undifferentiated consciousness is considered the ultimate state. Participants demonstrate varying degrees of surrender to that process, leading them to describe in various ways the experience of not being the doer:

> *"Only God chooses. However, this does not mean that we have no responsibility in the world. God chooses but what is our responsibility to that? First is compassion to all living beings, animals and this whole nature itself."* (G11)

Theme 2: Desire and attachment are the root causes of unhappiness

Early on the journey to Self-realisation, all participants become aware of the nature of their own desires, and came to the conclusion that the goal of peace and happiness cannot come from obtaining the objects of the world:

> *Attachments to worldly possessions and sensual pleasures trapped me and prevented me from finding true freedom in life. The more I freed myself from ego, desires and expectations, the closer I came to happiness, joy, love and peace."* (G4)

It is clear to all participants that the attainment of desires only gives fleeting pleasure and that no matter how many objects are possessed, the desire for more objects continues:

"I was fulfilling one desire, another was coming. I was a fool that was searching [for] the happiness where it is not. Sense pleasure only gave me a glimpse that there is happiness, and I learnt to cut off my desires and search happiness out in the proper place – within." (D9)

"The more we have the more we want. People always think that if they attain something, whether it's more money, a better job, a good husband, then they will be happy. But it never works like that. Happiness and peace are not found in acquisition, but rather in renunciation of our attachment. We have been hypnotized to believe that the key to life lies in attainment of material possessions, professional success, external achievement, and status and sensual pleasures. We have been deluded, deceived and blinded by the power of Maya, cosmic illusion." (G4)

One participant, originally from a traditional upper-class American family, with an apparent destiny to become a paediatric neuropsychologist, returned to America deeply impressed by the happiness she had gained from her spiritual connection during a trip to India. She subsequently conducted her own unofficial happiness survey and questioned many American associates who had attained the peak of their various professions. Without exception, the response to the question "Are you happy?" was "I'll be happy when … ". They all saw happiness as something that would come in the future, perhaps when the new house was completed or a son graduated and found a good job. It was this realisation of the limited value of worldly objects that inspired her to return to India for a simple life of service, and to eventually take vows as a *swami*[21]. She has remained there fulfilling these vows for the last twenty-six years:

[21] The word swami means master, and signifies mastery over the smaller self and habit patterns, so that the eternal Self can shine through. It is an act of renunciation, generally into one of nine Hindu renunciate orders, and marks a setting aside of all worldly pursuits, so as to devote full-time effort to the direct experience of the Self, and to the service of others in the same endeavour.

"I knew I had found something I was not even looking for. I knew I had been handed a gift more precious than all the diamonds in the world. I knew it was not a gift to refuse. I said, 'I will not leave, I am happier here, more at peace here, more full of joy and meaning here than I ever even imagined was possible.'" (D6)

Another Western woman (English) who went to India in the 1970s as a teenager and who now runs her own ashram as a *swami*, said:

"I realized the futility of everything: dances, parties and boys. I found no satisfaction in it. I was looking like everybody else for answers where they weren't any. I could never get enough because I was never satisfied. Even if I got some happiness, the next day it wasn't there anymore. There was a gradual growth of lack of interest in the world. I'd experienced the pain of the world, but it never occurred to me that one could get out of the pain ... or that there was any answer anywhere else. It was just that, 'no, I have to get a better boyfriend and more money'. But I started to realize deeply more and more each time that there wasn't any answer there. There wasn't any joy there, and the joy that was coming from spiritual study and from meditation and from clarity inside, that joy was incomparable. Nothing, none of the happinesses could compare with the happiness that's coming just from the pure life." (G7)

Participants clearly identify the need to transcend desire and attachment, and the reactivity and bad habits which tend to follow in their wake. They acknowledge the need to exercise restraint over the baser instincts by overcoming greed, lust and anger. This understanding of participants is consistent with the *Bhagavad Gita*, when it describes the process of how desire and attachment lead to mental dis-ease and unhappiness, and how inner happiness and peace arise when desire is understood and controlled. (ii.63) (Swami Rama, 1996). In the words of one participant:

"One journey is external and one is within. The more we take a path or journey external, the more we become unhappy and disturbed. And the more we take the journey from external to internal, then happiness will start revealing itself." (G7)

Theme 3: Mental and emotional self-mastery are essential attributes

Instability of the mind and emotions was described as another challenge to be overcome in the process of knowing and experiencing the Self. Developing mastery over the mental and emotional aspects is emphasised by nineteen participants (including all of those focused on the path of Self-knowledge – *jnana*.)

The mind is recognised as being responsible for either bondage to the objects of the world (if it identifies with the senses) or, alternatively, to realisation of the Self. Its attitude determines whether life's events are viewed as positive or negative, and therefore influences one's happiness levels. Early in the journey to Self-realisation, all these participants had attempted to free the mind of unwanted and undesirable thoughts and emotions and develop the calm and steady mind necessary for seeing life (and themselves) without any distortions. They have been able to intellectually analyse and understand situations without either suppressing or avoiding feelings or acting out of them. Objectivity enables them to identify the causes of thoughts or aroused emotions and take responsibility for them. It is clear to them that it is identification with the mind and the ego that causes one to become emotional and fluctuate between happiness and depression:

"In case by habit sometimes an emotion comes up, I don't blame anybody. I know that I have a little more contemplation to do. I don't say that fellow is making me angry, I know he isn't. He is telling me something, my reaction makes me angry. I have to fix my reaction, not the other person's speech. So I take the response on to myself and

continuously work on myself automatically, because I know fixing other people doesn't solve the problem." (G8)

"When I'm depressed, when I'm sad, when I am angry, when I am unloving, I know these are all robbers. I go inside and clean up the mess that is in the basement or attic, releasing my mental emotional issues and negativity." (D2)

"Whenever I have difficulties, it is my mind which is disturbed. 'Me' is always there, 'me' is never disturbed; it is outside people, outside world, outside things that disturb the mind, but not 'me'. It is only the mind that is suffering." (G5)

Thus an important aspect in the process of Self-realisation is developing emotional intelligence and becoming emotionally stable. Participants achieve this by developing the ability to observe their own reactivity and identify the underlying cause – desire and attachment. States of judgement, anger, fear and jealousy are overcome. As participants became increasingly established in the Self, the mind is no longer swayed by emotion:

"When reality goes in, the evolving world has clearly got nothing to do with my happiness. It is instrumental, but it is not the cause of anything, nor is it cause for any complaints." (D3)

As understanding of reality deepens, greater objectivity comes about, and as a result there is less reactivity to the ups and downs of life:

"I'm very happy; sometimes I get irritated or tired or something, but it's in the body or the mind not anywhere else." (G7)

"I am not ruffled by anything. If someone comes and says something bad about me, I am not bothered, I don't get angry." (D13)

"I have become like the ocean – the waves come and go, but the ocean is peaceful." (G4)

As participants became more and more identified with the inner Self, they were able to increasingly sever attachments to things of the world, due to seeing the world as illusory or as having only relative reality (see *mithya* p.151). This enables them to detach themselves from the occurrences in the material world and steer their thoughts toward the Self. Thirteen participants describe the process of Self-realisation as being one where the mind itself is recognised as being essentially unreal, *"a bundle of thoughts"* (D10), and to eventually dissolve in the 'Self':

> *"By knowing that everything is a play of the mind, half the problem of realisation is solved. By meditation, the other half goes. When the mind is silenced, Samadhi, the non-dual state of the Self, is experienced."* (D7)

Twenty-three participants live a life of detached action, dedicating their time to working tirelessly for others (see Appendix A). Yet they appear to remain unaffected by the fruits of their actions. They talk of neither having attachment to success, with the resulting feelings of hope and joy, nor aversion to failure and the resultant feelings of despair and misery.

In the time I spent with my participants, I observed that many demonstrated a state of equanimity in activities, thought and speech, in spite of often challenging circumstances.

Each summer, as soon as the snow conditions permit, one participant treks to her makeshift home in the high Himalayas. One year when I was camping nearby (in order to conduct this research), she found her home destroyed and all her essential possessions, such as bedding, cooking gas and stove, stolen. She describes how she was left to crouch below the remaining rock face without adequate shelter, warmth or food. She did not react, nor seek to retaliate against the culprit, but remained joyfully engaged in her spiritual practices, serving all who came to her for help and guidance. A mountaineer, returning from his expedition shortly

after, was visiting her for satsang[22],. He rebuilt her home and left behind all necessary requirements. The *Bhagavad Gita* emphasises this necessity of remaining unperturbed by either pleasure or pain (ii.15).

Such equanimity appears to arise from a profound connection with the Self. With that connection in place, anxiety, fear and insecurity are transcended. One participant (G1) explains this phenomenon by sharing a message that he received from the deeper Self following his first spiritual revelation: *"If you surrender your life to me and me alone, you have nothing to fear."* He describes an ecstasy of '*perfect intimacy and absolute trust'* that arose as he became convinced that his existence was not separate from the universal Self.

Theme 4: Character and values are the basis for spiritual life

The value of values

The journey to Self-realisation is also one of replacing selfishness with selflessness. This process is one of the increasing development of virtues. Initially there is a conscious effort to develop ones such as patience, compassion, forbearance, truthfulness, non- attachment, discrimination, equanimity, non-violence, etc. The development of these qualities facilitates transcendence of the ego and, as participants move closer to realisation, such qualities become a natural expression. Eighteen participants described the process of Self-realisation as being synonymous with the development of positive human qualities:

> *"Renunciation in the modern world is giving up bad qualities." (D3)*

In the early stages, it is important that good values are made an integral part of their lives:

> *"If you are not truthful, practice is meaningless. It is like a pot with a hole at the bottom; everything will drain away." (G5)*

[22] Translated as 'the company of the highest truth.' It is either spending time with a guru or an assembly of persons who listen to, talk about and assimilate the truth.

The process of developing virtues begins with sincerely attempting to foster them in day-to-day life. Assimilated values establish the necessary climate for the realisation of deeper aspects of the Self:

> *"The practice of human values in thought, word and deed begins a cleansing process which allows the light of Atma[23] to manifest."* (D1)

As the process unfolds, it seems that these virtues emerge from within, rather than being acquired from without. The participants found that good character becomes a natural reflection of the Self within (which they see as the repository of virtues) and expresses itself spontaneously:

> *"Once we know the Self, all qualities come of their own accord."* (D7)

> *"Self-enquiry and perseverance are important. And then, once the process begins to unfold automatically, the other qualities arise."* (D4)

> *"Once the soul is free it can express itself: the only way it expresses itself is through goodness."* (G11)

Sub-theme: Values are expressed as selflessness – an observed phenomenon

Whilst conducting the field work for this study, one of the most striking experiences and observations was the extra-ordinary selflessness and love that were evident in many of the participants. During interviews with practitioners in the Himalayan regions, I felt part of a circle of love where spontaneous giving encircled me. Every possible need was met with love and care. Soft fluffy blankets appeared in my cave. A beautiful meditation shawl was gifted. Ayurvedic powders, vitamins and fruit were brought when it was discovered I had an infected foot and lovingly prepared meals were brought every evening in spite of the knowledge that I had plenty of supplies.

[23] The universal Self, identical with the eternal core of the personality

Many participants offered their time and energy far in excess of the interview requirements. It appeared to me that everything that was possessed by them was freely given away to anyone who could benefit, with no thought of the hardship this may cause the participant himself. I observed that there is a generosity of spirit that arises from spiritual practice. *"It belongs to God; why ask me?*" was the common response I heard from spiritual practitioners to requests for material goods. When I visited one participant for an interview, I discovered that she had just given away her last woollen cap and walking shoes.

Sub-theme: The importance of selfless service

For twenty-three of the participants, the development of virtues had deepened into a life of constant selfless service. This is described as being an outer expression of the inner goodness of the Self and having many benefits. Self-realisation is a subtle process. As such it cannot take place in a mind perpetually disturbed by desires. Through selfless service, likes and dislikes are overcome to a great extent, making the participants' minds more fit for the subtle process of Self-realisation:

> *"Karma yoga is important because it cleanses your mind, it neutralises your likes and dislikes."* (D3)

Some advocate the path of service as a means of spiritual liberation. Participants explain that as one undertakes selfless service, consciousness expands and deepens, and the Self is more clearly known. For these twenty-three participants, as the process of Self-realisation unfolded, selfless service became spontaneous:

> *"Why is the breeze blowing? Why is the water flowing? Knowledge, self-knowledge, understanding of yourself, is like that – a natural flow. When I ask myself why I am helping somebody, I know there is nothing else to do because I have nothing to gain any more in life."* (G8)

"Everything in life is serving. The water is serving, the tree is giving shade, the plant is giving medicine, and when we get close to the Self, the impulse is we want to serve more." (G9)

It is seen as a natural expression of the inner Self:

"You are a happy person. Happiness shared is happiness doubled. I am not doing service for the sake of it; I am just sharing my completeness." (G4)

"I love you because you are my own reflection; you love me because I'm your reflection. This oneness, this unity, comes to be experienced in the field of service." (D7)

It is also seen as the core motivation in life. The array of service projects initiated and conducted by these participants is comprehensive (see Appendix A).

Theme 5: Spiritual practices are essential to the process of Self-realisation

All participants have undertaken significant spiritual practices[24] at some stage during their journey. For each, the progression of their practice(s) is unique. Some began with intense practices and progressed to service activities, while for others it was the reverse. Intensity in the inner process is commonly translated into intensity in humanitarian activities and vice versa. All participants demonstrate a total commitment to the spiritual process. Their lives are spent in spiritual activities.

The Four Yogas: Jnana, Bhakti, Karma and Raja

The spiritual practices and way of life engaged in by the participants fall into four categories: *Jnana* – self-enquiry; *Bhakti* – devotion; *Karma – selfless* service (see previous section) and *Raja* yoga – meditation. It is not that these categories of spiritual practice are utilised

[24] Disciplined and dedicated spiritual exertion dedicated to the goal of Self-realisation. Equivalent to the Sanskrit work *sadhana* – a means of accomplishing something.

exclusively, but there is a kind of integration of the facets that are melded by each person in their own unique manner. The primary focus often changes over a period of time, as illustrated in the synopses at the end of this chapter.

Jnana or self-enquiry commences with the practice of using the intellect to understand the Self. It probes the nature of the Self with questions such as 'Who Am I?' However, it is not merely an intellectual exercise; it facilitates true knowing and clear awareness of the Self, by systematically exploring and setting aside false identities (see 4.2.1). It is based on direct experience (Swami Vivekananda, 1896/1984)

Bhakti is the practice of devotion, love, compassion and service to God. All actions are done in the context of loving the Divine (Swami Vivekananda, 1896/1984).

Karma is the path of union through action and relates to both action and its effects. It is a way of acting, thinking and willing by which one orients oneself toward realization by behaving in accordance with one's duty without consideration of personal self-centered desires, likes or dislikes. One acts without being attached to the fruits of one's deeds (Swami Vivekananda, 1896/1984).

Raja yoga is concerned principally with the cultivation of the mind, using meditation to further one's acquaintance with reality, and in this way attain realisation (Swami Vivekananda, 1896/1984).

Throughout the findings, all four of these orientations to spiritual practice can be understood as being intertwined, with each providing a balance for the others. This is illustrated in the following statement by a practitioner of *bhakti* yoga (devotion):

> *"Self-enquiry is also crucial because, unless we understand what our purpose is and what our true goal should be and who we are and who is God and what our*

relationship is with others from a point of knowledge, then we won't know where to go." (G11)

A practitioner predominantly focused on meditation stated:

"Love (bhakti) gives you the power to merge from the finite to infinity." (D12)

The central role and importance given to spiritual practice are illustrated in the following example. When he was a student/disciple, one of the participants (now a guru) had not been permitted by his guru to begin a large service project until he had undergone a strict seventeen-month *anusthan*.[25] This involved remaining in complete silence, eating only once a day, and filling the days and nights with *gayatri japa*[26], meditation and yoga (G4).

Twenty-three practitioners are engaged in significant selfless service (*karma* yoga), regardless of their predominant practice, be it self-enquiry (*jnana*), devotion (*bhakti*) or meditation (*raja*). Conversely, all those engaged in service also practice self-enquiry and lead lives completely devoted (*bhakti*) to either their guru or an aspect of divinity. All participants seriously practiced meditation (*raja*) at some stage. The common factor that underpins all spiritual practice is a burning desire to realize the Self.

A general observation that emerged was that intense formal practice (such as *japa* or meditation) diminishes as a participant matures in spiritual knowledge. However, as one participant states:

"Sadhana (spiritual practice) is something that drops off, not something you should stop." (G7)

At the beginning of the process, it appears that spiritual practices play an important role. However, as the practitioner matures, the spiritual practice merges into their everyday life:

[25] Focused spiritual practice for a specific period of time, cut off from worldly activities.
[26] Invoking and repeating the *gayatri* mantra. This is a well-known vedic mantra from a hymn of the Rig Veda, invoking the illumination of intelligence.

"These practices on any of the paths only serve to make us pull back a bit from our extreme attachment and desire for sense objects. That brings us clarity and then the true path starts." (G10)

"In spiritual practice we connect our self to the Self. The moment we introduce our self to the Self, realisation will start revealing itself." (G5)

The following five participant profiles provide samples of the unique unfolding of spiritual practice that applies to each participant:

G4 went into seclusion for one year when only seven years old and subsisted on a simple daily meal of boiled lentils and two flatbreads. Following the instruction of his guru, he took up the practice of silence and meditation, spending eleven hours per day standing on one leg (*vrikshasana* or tree pose). He left for the Himalayan forests and jungles when he was eight years old and lived alone, deeply immersed in silence and rigorous spiritual practices for a further nine years. After spending his adolescence in continued intense austerities in an ashram at the foothills of the Himalayas, he was called to Canada and the US. in order to establish a Jain-Hindu Temple.

He is now the spiritual head of one of the largest spiritual institutions in India and chairperson of an international non-profit humanitarian research foundation. This work (together with his guidance of increasing numbers of devotees from around the world and meetings with political leaders to bring about environmental and social change) permits him little time for spiritual practices. However, he still performs a forty day *anusthan*[27] annually.

G7 also began her journey with intense spiritual practice. She travelled from England to India as a teenager. Shortly after landing, she was initiated as a *sadhu*[28]. She was given a pair of ill-

[27] Focused spiritual practice removed from worldly duties.
[28] An ascetic is a wandering monk who has renounced all material and sexual attachments. Typically an ascetic or *sadhu* will beg for food and not spend more than three days in any one place.

fitting shoes, a piece of orange cloth to wrap herself in and sent out to wander. She soon discovered her guru on the banks of the Ganges, which heralded forty years of extreme renunciation and very intense practice. She became renowned for the intensity and severity of her practices, which included the following: severe food disciplines (including long fasts, eating only once per day, living on berries, bilva leaves or milk for years at a time); meditating from 5pm to 5am; only sleeping for 2-3 hours in the afternoon; putting up with extreme hot or cold (remaining outdoors throughout the night with little clothing in snow or monsoon rains) and chanting or praying without ceasing.

She has now given up all formal spiritual practice and spends her days in a small hut on the banks of the Ganges working to bring into being a massive hospice project in a town many miles distant. Selfless service is now her *sadhana*[29].

Compare this with G5, who began her spiritual journey while completing a Master's degree in Special Education in America. She subsequently spent decades serving in an arm of a spiritual organisation as the principal of a boarding school for tribal children in the interior of India. She resigned from this role to travel to the Himalayas, taking up a dwelling in a remote cave, where she has dedicated the last thirteen years to intense spiritual practice.

Some participants, such as D13 and G12, have spent the first part of their lives as householders out in the world. D13 completed a successful career as a prominent nuclear physicist, receiving India's highest award, the prestigious *Padma Shri*. On retirement twenty years ago, he offered his services to a university run by a large spiritual organisation in South India, where he took up the position of Vice Chancellor. Realising the parallels between Vedanta and the emerging concepts of modern physics, he became inspired to immerse himself in spiritual practice. He now heads the multi-media division of this organisation and

[29] Spiritual practice

practices an amalgam of the yogas, without the formality of set routines. His life is given over to service (*karma* yoga), from which wisdom (*jnana* yoga) and love (*bhakti* yoga) emerge.

G12 was born in the suburbs of Melbourne. Marrying and raising a family in Germany occupied several years. As the family grew up, her life shifted and she began to search in earnest for a spiritual master. Relocating to India, she began her spiritual instruction and the first phase of intense practice that was to last fifteen years. She subsequently became the first woman to be initiated into a 5,000-year-old spiritual tradition with the *Naga Sadhus*[30]. Fulfilling an ancient prophecy, she was subsequently ordained as the head of this ancient lineage, much to the consternation of the male initiates, who had enjoyed exclusive rights up until that time. Her predecessor requested that she take the teachings to the West, but not to wear the orange robes of her swami status and to mingle as an everyday person. She now focuses her time on healing work, teaching and training holistic yoga teachers.

Theme 6: A teacher is necessary to the process

Twenty-three participants can be clearly identified as living lives which are wholeheartedly surrendered to their guru (see below for definition). They affirm that the guru/disciple relationship has been an integral and essential part of their spiritual progress.

Sub-theme: The guru comes in different forms

One participant, D11, denounces the value of a guru, advocating instead for unmediated and direct investigation of reality. I observed that he spends six hours each day literally crying for the Divine Mother, so although he has no person as his guru, he is very attached to this aspect of divinity. Morning and evening, he kneels on the banks of Ganga (the river Ganges as a deity), and waits for her presence. There is a large plaque on the rocks on the banks stating that this is the place where the tears of love fall.

[30] Traditionally these *sadhus* do not wear clothes (except perhaps a loin cloth), but cover themselves in ash. They commonly have dreadlocks and smoke gang (marijuana). Coloured marks on the forehead identify allegiance to a particular sec.'

Another participant, D12, worships Shiva[31], and also has profound reverence for a mountain which he perceives as his guide, protector and mentor. Although he would not divulge the guru who had initiated him, the mountain has become his 'guru'. Two participants have had a series of spiritual teachers. One of these (GI, a Westerner) had been proclaimed as the successor of his last guru, but has had a falling out with him over philosophical differences so has forged his own path as a spiritual teacher outside of the Indian tradition, basing himself in the US.

Defining 'guru' through the participants' perspectives

In Indian tradition, the spiritual teacher is known as a guru. It is not easy to find an accurate English translation to convey the depth of the meaning of this word. Although it has often been translated to mean 'teacher', it is clear from the interviews that the real import is vastly different from such a limited interpretation. 'Gu' signifies the darkness of spiritual ignorance, and 'ru' the light of knowledge that removes it. The syllable 'ru' also signifies that which is without form. The guru is one who embodies knowledge of the Self and dispels the darkness of ignorance in the disciple and bestows the state beyond attributes and form. (Grimes, 1996). The guru/disciple relationship, established in the oral traditions of the *Upanishads* (Swami Nikhilanada, 2008), remains a fundamental aspect of the process of Self-realisation for almost all the modern-day participants in this study.

Much more than 'teacher'

Participants each describe their guru as being much more than a teacher who had just studied the scriptures or imparted knowledge. They are described as having realised the truth through renunciation and spiritual practice, and having directly experienced the Self. Although outwardly these gurus may not appear to be special when compared to others, the benefits

[31] A Hindu deity, representing the dissolution aspect of creation. Often worshipped as a lingam (phallus).

they bestow on their disciples go far beyond that of a mere teacher and are critical to their progress.

"How important is yourself? That is how important the guru is." (D3)

"The real guru is a one who introduces you to yourself. … The guru can take you from anywhere to the Self." (G8)

"He is like a lighthouse." (D7)

The Guru's work

The guru knows his disciples intimately and prescribes such sadhana or spiritual practices that will exactly suit their temperament. With the care, attentiveness and discipline of a mother, the guru creates all the situations and circumstances necessary for the growth of the seeker, yet emanates an unconditional and universal love, providing blessings and inspiration.

"My guru is like a doctor: he fixes all my problems." (D13)

"He gives me love, inspiration and innermost promptings." (D1)

The gurus are described as not only valuable in finding various ways to identify and remedy defects that are obstacles to progress in disciples, but also assisting disciples to identify and transform such obstacles in their own lives. For some, life has become increasingly like a mirror in which negativity and character flaws are reflected:

"The role of the guru is to scrub and clean our heart, to see that it shines forth with the wisdom that is latent in it." (D13)

"The guru corrects your mistakes and raises you up to God's world." (…)

In order to transform the disciple, the guru often appears extremely harsh in his treatment. Many participants describe incidents when they felt they could take no more, after which important lessons would take root:

"One time, I almost threw myself under an ongoing train. I had had enough of his slaps. I told him, breaking my silence, as I thought they would be my last words: 'Forget it. I have had enough. It is better to die than to endure this day after day.' (G4)

Later this disciple realised:

"He was not beating me due to his own anger. He was molding me, shaping me, beating out any vestiges of attachment and ignorance, besting down my ego. He knew, every step of the way, exactly what he was doing, and he was in full control. He slapped me because it was the quickest, clearest and most direct way to literally knock an idea or a concept into me or out of me." (G4)

This guru had a profound love for this teacher of his youth and has now become the loving 'father' to many orphaned boys.

Transmission as well as teaching

When the guru abides in communion with the Self, certain osmosis takes place between the guru and those in his company, which raises the consciousness of the disciples.

"Living in the presence of my Divine Master remoulded and restructured my thoughts and beliefs." (D1)

"His divine radiation keeps burning away my mental dross." (D1)

Interestingly, I experienced a similar transmission on several occasions. During three of the interviews, my consciousness became elevated and it was hard to keep hold of the thread of the conversation. The profound uplifting effect lasted several days. When I reviewed the content, I realised the words themselves did not contain great significance when compared to the experience that had unfolded. This indicates that there is a level of transmission beyond mere conversation.

The guru imparts impulses that are transformational in nature. Many participants expressed their gratitude for the inner awakening which had taken place as a result of transmission from the guru. One participant described two powerful awakening experiences, the first with a *kriya* yoga master, the other with his subsequent guru, an Advaita Vedantan [32]:

> *"He rubbed his hand up and down my spine chanting mantras. Suddenly I felt as if the bottom of my spine was plugged into electricity. I felt this energy surging throughout my body and into the brain. White light was everywhere." (G1)*

> *"He whispered, 'you don't have to make any effort to be free' and as he spoke I saw in my eye of mind water running down the side of the mountain like a brook, and I realised the brook was my true nature, which was like water flowing freely. I realized that my true nature had always been free; that it was an illusion that I was not enlightened." (G1)*

Another participant described the transformative experience he had when his guru placed his thumbs firmly on the third eye:

> *"I lost all consciousness of the outside world. It was as though the vessel of my individual consciousness was shattered and – just like the air in a pot merges with the air outside as soon as the pot is broken – my personal consciousness suddenly became one with the individual consciousness. I was simultaneously aware of nothing and aware of everything. Behind my closed eyelids, with the inner, divine eye, I beheld a bright white light into which everything dissolved."* (G4)

Sub-theme: The outer guru leads to the inner guru

Participants commonly held the view that the role of the outer guru is to help awaken the inner guru. They acknowledged that while God and guru are within each person, as long as

[32] An Advaita Vedantin is one who practises the philosophy of non-dualism

the ego persists, the seeker remains unaware of this. If the disciple has lost the ability to 'hear' God, due to being so externally orientated, the outer guru becomes the voice of the Self.

> *"Outer guru has only one role: to get you to the inner guru. The guru is the Self. The guru is your consciousness."* (D7)

Rabindranath Tagore (2012) gives one explanation of the mystery of the guru/disciple relationship. He says that an embodied soul or *jiva*[33] wanders through hundreds of thousands of births in different bodies, searching for the way to attain its own true state of the eternal Supreme Self. Through its struggles, it achieves consecutively higher and higher states of evolution. Finally, at a stage due to the intensity of man's longing to reach his goal of perfection, a miracle happens: the inner soul which was driving him towards his real nature separates itself and assumes a form and guides him to the goal.

This sheds light on the view that is held by some of the senior practitioners: that the guru is none other than their own Self, who has come to guide their steps towards realisation. Participants attempt to describe this mystery in various ways:

> *"If the guru is omnipresent, how can he be absent in me?"* (D5)

> *"My inner voice is my Master's voice."* (D14)

There is a progression from being reliant on the physical form of the guru, to communing with the presence within. Those participants whose gurus are deceased continue an intimate and close relationship with their guru, which is just as real and devoted as when they were alive. The guru's consciousness is discovered to be all-pervading and the whole of the disciple's life continues to be lived in devotion and communion.

[33] Individual soul

Theme 7: Realisation is constant integrated awareness

Mithya – the mirage, is it real?[34]

Participants make it clear that, in their experience, Self-realisation is nothing other than experiencing the truth behind the mirage of apparent reality. The ego self, with all its desires and attachments, maintains the mirage that the world perceived by the senses is the 'real' one.

Twenty participants understand that the apparent world is like an illusion. Some describe this understanding as one of developing a sense of dual realities. They come to see themselves as 'actors' on the stage of life, yet they also perceive the play of life as if from another place of consciousness.

> *"Initially, it is like having a double vision. As one gets more established in the consciousness of the inner Self, gradually the world of appearance becomes less and less real, in spite of the fact it is real for the mind and the senses."* (G7)

This perception relates to *mithya*, a Vedantic concept which is discussed more fully in the discussion chapter (p.151).

Sub-theme: Attaining Self-realisation is difficult

The attainment of genuine Self-realisation is likely to be very rare and almost impossible to measure. However, seventeen participants indicate that they have had significant experiences of, or immersion in, a profound recognition of their own true nature – the Self or *Atma*[35]. Only three participants actually stated they are Self-realised, two of which had a primary focus on *jnana* yoga (the path of enquiry).There is some evidence that others may be realised. Their intimate knowledge and the way they discuss their experiences provide some indication of this. As the state of Self-realisation is beyond the mind and defies description, it is possible that there are misconceptions around its attainment. Certainly a temporary

[34] See p.151 for a full explanation of Mithya
[35] The individual self, known after Self-realisation to be identical to the universal Self.

experience of the Self can be reached in *Samadhi*[36]; however, the degree to which practitioners experienced the awareness of the ultimate reality of the Self, as a constant in their lives, is difficult to assess.

It would not be expected that those that are realised would declare it, as humility is a sign of a transcended ego. It is possible that the experience of the two *jnana* practitioners was temporary or limited. (One of these practitioners later resigned his position as trustee of his own organisation due to sexual misconduct, which indicates he was still seeking happiness through sensual pleasure.) However, senior practitioners certainly demonstrate many of the hallmarks of Self-realisation, such as profound peace, happiness and joy which appear to be unaffected by the vicissitudes of the world; unconditional love for others; selfless action; and a wisdom gained from deep self-enquiry.

The attainment of Self-realisation represents a penetration into the profound depth of human consciousness, through which the ultimate source of being itself becomes accessible. However this attainment does not appear to be static, but an evolving process wherein consciousness is revealed. This attainment is reflected in the following descriptions of practitioners:

> *"When you keep penetrating into the infinite depths of your own self, awareness of time, space and physical body disappears, and all structures of the created universe begin to crumble before your eyes. Awareness itself – limitless, empty, pristine – becomes your reality."* (G1)

> *"Self-realisation is continuous communion with the highest levels of consciousness in the depths of one's being."* (D13)

[36] A state of meditation or concentration resulting in union with, or absorption into, ultimate reality.

Sub-theme: The Self is always there.

There seems to be a consensus among twenty-five participants that, in essence, realisation is nothing other than identifying with one's own fundamental nature. It is not something to be gained; rather it is a process of uncovering what is already there. Upon Self–realisation, one becomes aware that, all along, the one-who-wanted-to-be-realised is the same as the one being looked for, but unknown until then. In other words, the one who seeks answers is the answer! One participant relayed the ancient Vedic story of the tenth man, to illustrate this point:

This story concerns ten men who decided to return from their guru's home (where they were studying) to their village for a festival. One of the men said that he would take responsibility for the group and make sure that they all arrived safely.

> *"They swam across the river and, on reaching the other side, the leader counted nine. Where is the tenth man? Again he counts. Everybody has a turn, but they all count nine! One fellow is gone. They have a sense of loss. A wise man comes and they say, 'Our tenth man has gone.' The wise man points out that the leader is the tenth man, but the moment he looked for the tenth man, he denies that he is it! The tenth man is always there. He is always experiencing himself. Ignorance is keeping the distance."* (G8)

This practitioner explained that this is our situation in *samsara*[37]. We 'count' everything we see and perceive, and we forget to 'count' ourselves. We will even 'search' for our Self in all kinds of places, situations and experiences, yet we are always and ever 'right here'. Our very own Self, which is totally present and available, is overlooked in all of our activities. We only discover Self-realisation when we've come to understand that we were already there to begin with, beyond the mind and senses.

[37] The indefinitely repeated cycle of birth, misery and death.

Participants described this realised state as one of dual awareness, where they are aware of the true nature of their inner being – the Self – at the same time as being aware of all the activities that go on around them. Just as in a cinema, the screen is fixed whilst the pictures move on it, the screen remaining unaffected by the movement of the pictures. In realisation, one is immersed in the screen (the consciousness of the Self) and not the pictures (apparent reality). Participants describe their perspective as one of remaining as witness only to the play of life, and therefore they remain unaffected by the ups and downs. There appears to be a permanent shift in understanding, a firm knowledge and awareness that one is not the mind, body, intellect or emotions, but eternal consciousness:

> *"Previously, I experienced myself as being trapped, a prisoner of my body, mind and emotions, but when I awakened to a new dimension, all sense of confinement disappeared. I become aware of a limitless dimension I did not even know was there. All sense of boundary, including memory and desire, dissolves in an effulgent sea of completeness that always already exists. In the end, you discover that all that exists is you!"* (G1)

Sub-theme: Being, awareness and bliss (*Sat-chit-ananda*) are the nature of Self-realisation

Twenty-four participants see Self-realisation as being identification with the essence of the Self, which is pure consciousness. They described the nature of this consciousness as awareness or presence and bliss. One participant, G1, presents a new context for the experience of Self-realisation, connecting it with scientific understanding of an evolutionary cosmos. He sees the process of Self-realisation as not just one of ultimately identifying with the pure consciousness of the Self (*purusha*), but also one of aligning oneself with what he calls "the evolutionary impulse" (*prakriti*). Based on his personal experience and insight, he

considers Self-realisation also involves waking up to this fundamental creative impulse of the universe and wholeheartedly participating in the process of evolutionary change.

The experience of Self-realisation is impossible to describe, because it is not an object. It is beyond all definition. Speech cannot express it; mind cannot think it and intellect cannot understand it. As a participant states:

> *"You're not a sound, cannot be heard. You are not a touch, cannot be touched. You are not a taste, cannot be tasted. You are not a smell, cannot be smelled. You are not a sight, cannot be seen. So, who you are is not an object or perception. So, these five means of knowledge at your disposal now seem to be redundant"* (G8)

The totality of realisation can be experienced when one is resting in a state of not knowing the mind, because in that state the knowledge of the Self is the ground of every conscious experience. Self-realisation occurs when the sense of individuality has dissolved:

> *"... the membrane of individuality broke."* (D4)

The perceiver, perception and object of perception become one indivisible whole:

> *"I was infinity that was conscious and self-aware, which was everything and which was also me, was a kind of impersonal absolute love that was almost unbearable I knew in those moments I had been more awake for the real and the true than I had ever been before."* (G1)

Participants all demonstrated the ability to cognize and express qualities of the Self in various ways.

Sub-Theme: Happiness is the expression of the true nature

For participants, only through knowing the Self can all the happiness that is sought in life be found. Happiness and joy are the spontaneous manifestations of the Self. They flow unobstructed by the ups and downs of life in the Self-realised. In realisation, one becomes

the embodiment of bliss and happiness. One does not so much enjoy happiness, but exist as happiness. Although it is impossible to determine from this study how many of the participants had become established in the state of Self-realisation, the discovery of a deep and pervasive inner happiness was described by twenty-four participants.

To comprehend the happiness that is inherent within the process of Self-realisation is a difficult feat, but there is evidence that this process does bring about a transformation that transcends the conceptual understanding of happiness. This is, perhaps, a deeper sense beyond what is generally perceived as 'being happy'. One Western participant has given up a promising career in psychology at Stanford University to become a *swami* in an ancient ashram on the banks of the Ganges. She says of her journey:

> *"There is a secret in India, a secret that compelled me to stay when I first arrived twenty-six years ago. The secret is, I believe, this deep awareness of wholeness and perfection. It is a secret that shines through the eyes of every orphaned child, through the eyes of every village woman carrying pounds of firewood on her head, through the eyes of the lowest class labourers. It is a secret that brings light to what should have been, by modern Western psychological standards, impenetrable darkness. It is a secret that allows hundreds of children to defy statistics, hypotheses and theories. It is a secret that has never heard of post-traumatic stress disorder. .What is that secret? I have accused myself of romanticism, simplicity and sentimentality over and over again. After all, I am a scientist, not a mystic. But nothing I had learned, nothing I had read, nothing I had studied, measured or thought I understood could explain the phenomenon before my eyes."* (D6)

This participant concludes that a strong spiritual connection is the deciding factor for a positive psychological outlook:

> *"One of the most profoundly compelling aspects of Indian culture is the unmistakable, palpable joy in which most Indians live. Poverty, disability, disease and misfortune may reduce their levels of 'current life satisfaction', but this drop is minimal and ephemeral. Overall, Indians are far happier and more content than their Western counterparts, evidenced both by scientific research as well as by simple observation."* (D6)

While gathering data for this study, I was reminded of India's 'secret'. As I embarked on a journey along the road in the small Himalayan town of Uttarkashi, the sound of Vedic chanting resonated across the hillsides from a new source every 100 metres or so. Thousands of pilgrims were making their way on foot, dressed in bright orange (to represent their renunciation of worldly comforts and desires), as they walked up to 300 kilometres back to their home communities, clutching not just their walking sticks but the treasured containers of Ganges water. This is collected from the sacred source of the Ganges every year, to take back for worship in their local temples and homes.

A group of *sadhus* (wandering holy men) smiled at me and called out '*Jai Ma*' (hail to the holy Mother) and a wizened old man smoking a *bidi*[38] raised his hands in the prayer position and bowed to me with the greeting '*namaskar*', honouring the divine within me. As I turned to gaze at the river, I saw groups of men, women and children casting their hopes, dreams and worries into the sacred river. Yes, India is steeped in spirituality. This deep spirituality seems to engender a profound happiness that transcends each individual's personal circumstances, such as poverty and illness. This happiness is part and parcel of the life that is reflected all around me.

The importance of spiritual practice is evident not only in the daily lives of the everyday person, but is also reflected at government level. By late July, there was a serious deficit in the monsoon rains. When I arrived in Karnataka on August 3rd 2012, rain started in earnest.

[38] Indian cigarette made from a rolled tobacco leaf

The government had paid 18.5 crore rupees so that prayers and *homa*[39] could be conducted in 37,000 temples across Karnataka on July 27th and August 3rd of that year (Anonymous, 2012). Reliance for the well-being and happiness of the state had been placed in the lap of the one Self, *Brahman*.

As all the layers of the ego self, with their desires and attachments, are dissolved and the unity of the self is realised, the true nature of the Self becomes naturally revealed as happiness:

> *"With a concentrated mind focused on the Self, there is complete joy within."* (G2)
>
> *"Spirituality has taken me to a heightened state of love, joy and peace."* (D14)
>
> *"I reached a place where I experience purity, overflowing love and unity with all."* (D1)

Happiness is experienced as the unchanging truth of the Self. It is constant and not affected by anything in the outer world. The love, peace, joy and happiness that participants had originally sought from objects outside of themselves is found to be within. It is discovered that happiness and the Self are no different:

> *"Happiness is my nature."* (D13)
>
> *"I am that joy, that peace."* (G5)
>
> *"When I am with the Self, the whole life to me is joy!"* (D3)
>
> *"When I am connected with the Self, I am jubilant, in bliss."* (G9)
>
> *"When the happiness and bliss of the Self is experienced there is complete independence and freedom from all worldly attachment."* (G2)

[39] Fire worship ceremony

"Then I discovered my essence as joy and peace. Now, I am always full of happiness and equanimity, whatever life presents." (D1)

Sub-theme: Transcendence is involved in universal identification (the non-dual state)

Nineteen participants described how, once the sense of separate self has been transcended, there is an awakening to the reality that everything is part of one non-dual consciousness. Everything in life comes to be seen as a different expression of one field. It is described as a state of never feeling separated from the Absolute:

"The totality flows." (G8)

"One is immersed in the consciousness that is the Self, and sees it everywhere." (D5)

"I am present everywhere, in everyone." (D5)

This non-dual consciousness is discovered to be the natural state of the Self:

"It is undivided fullness that is empty of time, empty of space, empty of location and empty of mind. The conscious experience of the Self is absolute knowing that is only knowing. In this knowing there is ceaseless recognition of absolute unqualified perfection. Abiding in that perfection always is liberation from time, space, location and mind." (G1)

"When I merged in God, I was like sugar, that when mixed with water, loses itself and becomes one with the water." (G4)

"I experience everything as the Self – the body, mind, world, all experiences – yet, paradoxically, the Self is not any of these. Just like the pond is lake, lake is not pond." (D3)

This identification leads to states of indescribable rapture:

"You have this feeling of oneness, this oceanic feeling. You are at the core of everything, and this is your joy and light." (D2)

"I become part of the whole universe, which is pulsating with divinity." (G3)

Sub-theme: Love is the essence of the spiritual process and the nature of the Self

The disappearance of a separate egoist existence and an awareness of non-dual consciousness lead to the emergence of an all-embracing, all-inclusive love. Pure love embraces all levels of thought and action:

"In this state we look upon others as our self." (D5)

"I began to see there is nothing but God and God is love." (D1)

The ground of being, the Self, comes to be seen as love. Love becomes acknowledged as the ultimate reality:

"When we are connected to the Self, we express the love inherent in it. We forget ourselves. Every thought, word and action automatically expresses that love." (G9)

The realisation of universal oneness expresses itself in pure, unalloyed love. This love is not binding. In this love there is no division and no difference:

"Unconditional love for all creation flows." (G5)

Being in communion with the Self expresses itself spontaneously as loving all that exists:

"You love human[s], you love birds, animals, trees, water, everything." (G6)

"Love emerges from the heart like a fountain and overflows in all directions." (D13)

Profile of the Realised person

What happens in the process of becoming Self-realised? Does it mean that life will not continue to present difficulties or even tragedies? Does it signify retirement from the activities of the world? No, it is the beginning of full immersion in activities to alleviate the suffering of others and better the world:

> *"When you go beyond the ego you become an offering to the world."* (G4)

What changes for participants is the perception or angle of vision used for approaching life; that is, they become witnesses to their lives without any trace of emotional attachment. They come to accept everything as due to God's will and develop a profound equanimity of the mind. Their minds become open to everything, whilst remaining detached from everything, manifesting as complete freedom from worldly circumstances:

> *"The Realised person is a mature, objective person who is no longer a victim of the mind or emotions and participates fully in life, donning roles at choice, but free and happy."* (G8)

A Self-realised person is described as a wise and mature human being with a deep acceptance of the way things are. Many participants speak of a feeling of complete fullness, with absolutely nothing else to gain in life:

> *"When you have discovered yourself, there is nothing to attain, nothing to reach, nothing to do."* (D7)

A kind of dis-identification with the body, mind and intellect is reported. There is a sense that the participant increasingly identifies with a 'blissful consciousness', which provides no scope for sundry mental afflictions:

> *"You find that no words, no thoughts, no descriptions every affect you. You remain absolutely detached, yet abide in and through everything."* (G8)

Once the Self is understood to be the source of all bliss, desires disappear and are replaced by the experience that happiness and fullness are within:

> *"When you are connected to the Self, you are jubilant, you are in bliss."* (G9)

Many participants begin to see everything as an extension of their own self; subsequently there is no 'other' to be angry or upset with. This shift in identification is gradual, never instantaneous, and becomes more and more stable over time. These participants come to see themselves and the world in a completely new way:

> *"Everything is dismissed but 'You' are not. You remain ever existent, pure awareness, stillness .You are aware of being the body and mind in the world, yet you are all-pervasive."* (G8)

With such words, attempts are made to describe the experience of realising the Self and the way in which knowledge of the Self eventually becomes fully assimilated. This is described as being accompanied by a sense of overwhelming freedom. The participants still see the dualistic world, yet come to understand that everything within it is but a permutation of name and form, atop the eternal substratum of pure consciousness that is the Self.

What I saw in such individuals was that life was no longer aimed at attaining happiness for themselves, but at attaining happiness for others. It has become about giving rather than taking:

> *"He [the Self-realised] is always ready to give. He exists only for others. And in this, he has joy."* (D12)

Such an attitude is evident in the high percentage of participants who are engaged in selfless activities (see Appendix A) and who appear to be unattached to the results of their tireless service:

> *"We live our lives like gardeners in God's garden – carefully tending each flower and each tree, but never becoming attached to what will blossom, what will flower, what will give fruit and what will wither away."* (G4)

Such participants spend their time in blissfully serving and uplifting humanity, fully understanding that all the bliss being sought from the outside world, in fact, comes from within. Such an understanding does not mean that action ceases, rather actions are no longer performed in order to gain happiness.

These participants note a gradual demolition of the sense of separateness, which in turn progresses to the gradual elimination of all the afflictions springing from the sense of separate self, such as anger, depression, anxiety, loneliness, resentment, jealousy and frustration. They explain how these arise from a type of reactivity to the duality that is perceived. As the duality diminishes, so does reactivity.

Many participants also describe a sense of fullness, which emerges from the joy they feel deep within. This fullness is described as an expansive expression of the joy they experience in perceiving the outer world not as separate, but as a part of themselves. The object/subject nature of existence becomes replaced by the flow of joyful bliss, both into the world and from the world, into the heart.

5. Discussion

Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings, in light of IP and WP, and the effectiveness of IP for attaining positive psychological health. It presents a new model of the 'psychology of transcendence' which has arisen from the findings, discussing them in the broader context of psychology as a whole. It investigates some of the psychological and therapeutic implications of the study, exploring the possibility of a synergy between Western and Eastern psychological approaches. The value that IP might have for our knowledge, understanding, and practice of psychology is assessed. The guru-disciple relationship, an integral part of IP and the participants' process, is considered in the light of its appropriateness within a Western context. The major themes identified in the findings are highlighted throughout the discussion.

Self-realisation as an evolutionary stage in psychological development

The findings of this research indicate that it is possible to attain awareness or knowledge of an 'ultimate reality', called the Self (*Atman* or *Brahman)* in IP, which could be related to a deistic concept. However, this may be a limiting construct, which does not convey the non-dualistic interpretation that is implied by this study. An evolutionary stage in psychological growth of the human being is implied within this investigation. It parallels in many ways Maslow's notion of self-transcendence (Koltko-Rivera, 2006), as well as the concept of self-transcending wisdom in Sternberg's (1998) theory of cognitive psychology.

This process of Self-realisation is one of ego transcendence and the resultant awakening to non-dual awareness is seen as an advanced stage of psychological and spiritual development. The manifest universe appears as a single reality – the Self – the nature of which is love, in which all forms of existence reside. There is a sense that all things are interconnected and not separate, while at the same time retaining their seeming individuality (see *mithya* p. 151)

Self-realisation is motivated by an "*evolutionary impulse"* (G1), commonly described by participants as expressing itself in an intense desire for realisation. This impulse is seeking to emerge in and through the human being. Evolution in this sense is not that which occurs by natural selection, but evolution brought about by the application of spiritual knowledge to the conduct of human life and the refinement of the mind brought about by spiritual practice. Through the application of such knowledge to practical self-management, the IP practitioners in this study demonstrated that the awakening and development of faculties dormant in ordinary human beings can be achieved.

These faculties are aroused and developed in conjunction with virtues such as patience, compassion, forbearance, truthfulness, non-attachment and the replacing of selfishness with an attitude of selflessness. Without such virtues, Self-realisation is not possible.

The process of Self-realisation clearly has the potential to bring about positive psychological health. It is clear that within each person there are higher potentialities that can be realised through **dis-identification with the personalities and roles of the ego self** and the **mental and emotional self-mastery** that come from spiritual practice. Energy that has previously been caught up in mechanical, neurotic modes of behaviour can be used more effectively and efficiently and result in behaviours that lead to peace, happiness and contentment.

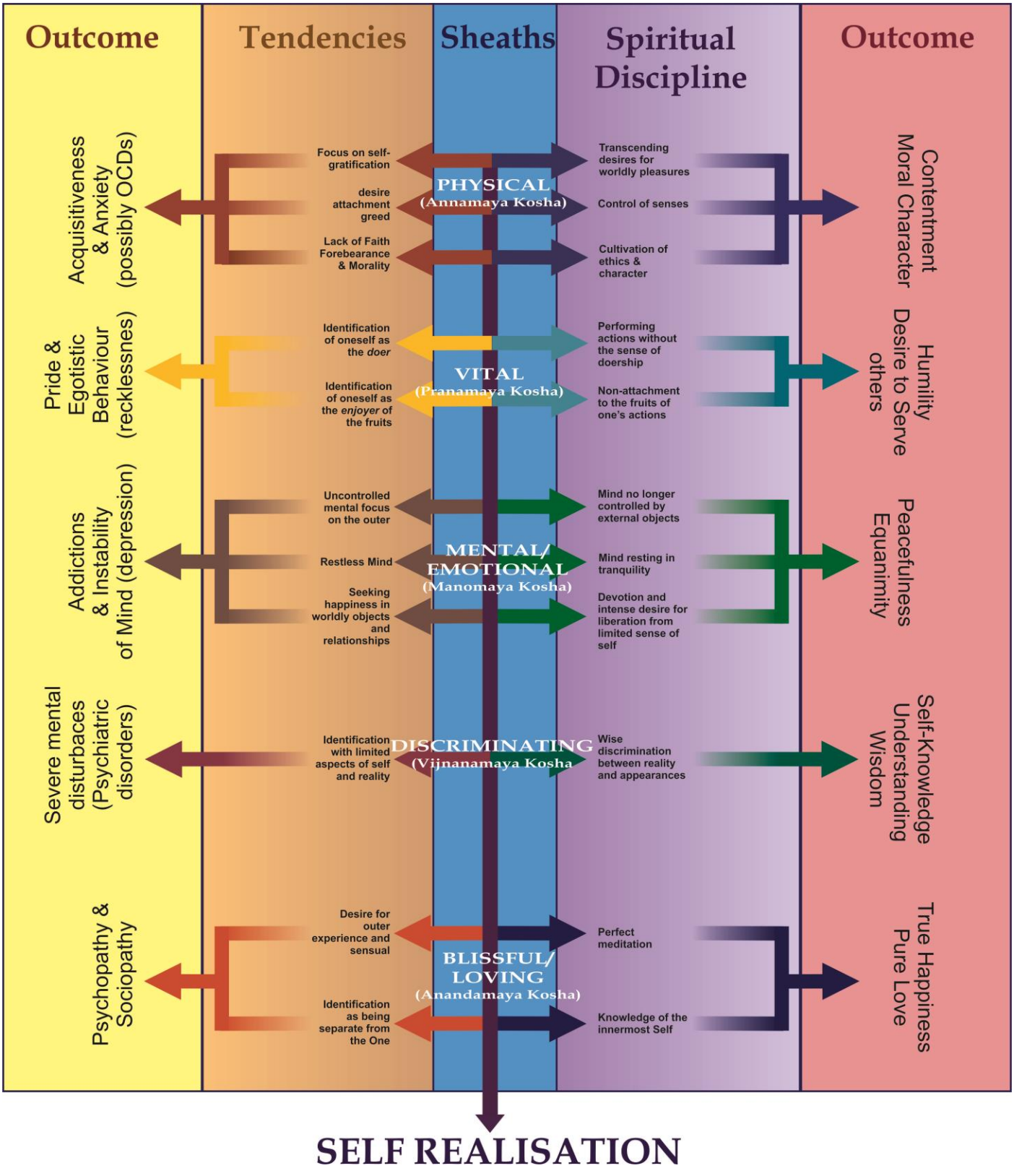
Outcome
Tendencies
Sheaths
Spiritual Discipline
Outcome
Acquisitiveness & Anxiety (possibly OCDs)
Pride & Egotistic Behaviour (recklessness)
Addictions & Instability of Mind (depression)
Severe mental disturbaces (Psychiatric disorders)
Psychopathy & Sociopathy
Focus on self-gratification
desire attachment greed
Lack of Faith Forebearance & Morality
Identification of oneself as the doer
Identification of oneself as the enjoyer of the fruits
Uncontrolled mental focus on the outer
Restless Mind
Seeking happiness in worldly objects and relationships
Identification with limited aspects of self and reality
Desire for outer experience and sensual
Identification as being separate from the One
PHYSICAL (Annamaya Kosha)
VITAL (Pranamaya Kosha)
MENTAL/ EMOTIONAL (Manomaya Kosha)
DISCRIMINATING (Vijnanamaya Kosha
BLISSFUL/ LOVING (Anandamaya Kosha)
Transcending desires for worldly pleasures
Control of senses
Cultivation of ethics & character
Performing actions without the sense of doership
Non-attachment to the fruits of one's actions
Mind no longer controlled by external objects
Mind resting in tranquility
Devotion and intense desire for liberation from limited sense of self
Wise discrimination between reality and appearances
Perfect meditation
Knowledge of the innermost Self
Contentment Moral Character
Humility Desire to Serve others
Peacefulness Equanimity
Self-Knowledge Understanding Wisdom
True Happiness Pure Love
SELF REALISATION

Fig. 7: The Psychology of Transcendence: A model of Self-realisation.

Transcendence as an applied psychology for ancient and modern times

From the findings, I have developed the model: 'The Psychology of Transcendence' (Fig. 7), which synthesises the experiences of participants and relates these to the concepts found in the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, as well as to psychological states commonly found in modern practice. It depicts the practices of modern-day practitioners of Indian spirituality and their outcomes, and allows the potential value for Western psychology to be identified.

The participants specified spiritual disciplines which they saw as integral to Self-realisation. The outcomes of these practices were equated to aspects of this. Several discussed challenges and obstacles and the maladies that they experienced prior to overcoming them, which are also identified.

The emergent themes from the study are expressed as spiritual disciplines, their outcomes being the consequences as described by participants. These outcomes are depicted in opposition with those tendencies which the participants viewed as the challenges they had to face in the process of Self-realisation. The chart depicts the relationship between the findings and the concept of *koshas* (sheaths) expounded in the *Upanishads*. The psychological states, both positive and negative, have been compiled from the identified aspects emerging from both the participants' experience and psychological practice (Barlow, 2008).

There is a progression, as well as an overlap between the aspects of the sheaths (*koshas*), the emergent themes and the process of Self-realisation. As such, each sheath (and the related thematic outcomes) cannot be seen as discrete in itself. Many of the themes described in the findings have aspects and applications that relate to more than one sheath. Therefore, because of this complexity, the application of the model in psychological theory and practice must be an integrated one.

As indicated in the model, the process of Self-realisation can be seen as one of learning to master the challenging art of differentiating between the many dimensions of human

experience. Integral to the process is the ability to transcend the ego through shifting the sense of identity from that which relates to the physical, mental and emotional realms, to that which identifies itself with the authentic or absolute Self, existing as the ground of being. In the *Katha Upanishad*, there is a strong distinction between one who identifies self with physical objects such as the body, senses, mind and ego, and one who identifies with the *Atman*[40] (ii.ii.8). This text emphasises the necessity of discriminating between the 'real' and the 'unreal.' (ii.ii.7).

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna imparts the path of *ksetra-ksetrajna vibhaga yoga*[41], in which the process of knowing the difference between knowledge of the physical body (*prakriti*)[42] and the creator of the body (*purusha*)[43] is emphasised (xii.1). The findings indicate that the knowledge and perspective of the 'Self-realised' person encompass those aspects of Self that are both 'non-absolute' and 'absolute'. Each and every relative expression of the Self is recognised to be only a small part of an infinitely bigger picture.

The essential emergent theme from this study is that the process of Self-realisation (and the experiences of non-dual awareness related to this process) is what liberates us from the existential prison of the relative self or ego. There was consensus among participants that when the ego falls into the background what emerges is great peace, joy and happiness.

The *Kathopanishad* (i.ii.xx) emphasises that peace and happiness belong to those who realise the Self, not to those who are focused on the external experience (1i.ii.xxxi). The *Bhagavad Gita* attributes psychological conditions, such as dejection, despondency, depression and sorrow, to ego and its attachments and equates Self-realisation with eternal happiness, peace

[40] *Atman* is variously translated as "Self" or "Soul" as distinct from the sense of body and mind (Dwivedi, 2002)
[41] Knowing the field and the Knower of the field
[42] Field, cosmos, creation, nature, matter
[43] Knower of the field, consciousness, supreme Self, God

and *anandam*[44] (ii.63-64) (Rama, 1996). The participants typically described it as an experience of joy:

> *"When I am with the Self, the whole life to me is joy!"* (D3)

> *"You really are at the core of everything; this is your joy and light."* (D2)

Realisation is about evolution beyond the ego. It is about consistently choosing to identify with the authentic or deeper Self, rather than the ego. Self-enquiry is a necessary part of this process, whereby practitioners come to see that they are not the mind, body, intellect or senses, but something more:

> *"In that Self enquiry, I get lost, I forget my personal identity, ego vanishes, and that is Self-realisation."* (D7)

Emerging from the findings is the concept that, in Self-realisation, the ego does not cease to exist altogether; there is still a sense of individualised 'self'. However, the conscious and unconscious investment in, and attachment to, those dimensions of the self, that inhibit our potential for Self-realisation, have been released. This absolute sense of Self is paralleled in Erikson's (1970) notion of achieved identity which arises from an exploration of different identities and realities, after which a choice for one is made. In the case of Self-realisation, however, there is an accompanying profound shift to a higher state of consciousness.

The findings also identified significant steps in the process of awakening to the Self. These are now discussed in the light of the broader context of psychology as a whole, by looking at common psychological states seen in psychotherapy and how these were addressed and transformed by the practitioners in this study, through an IP approach.

The following discussion progresses through the sheaths, relating them to the findings, and investigates the implications.

[44] Bliss

Annamaya Kosha – the physical sheath

From acquisitiveness to contentment and moral character - management of desires is important

Much of the current research on well-being has been derived from what could be termed a 'hedonic approach', focusing on happiness and describing well-being in terms of pleasure attainment and pain avoidance (Kubovy, Kahneman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999). The transcendence approach utilised by the participants in this study provides the possibility of guiding the investigation into new (and perhaps more fertile) areas of research and their application to current issues in psychology.

The findings indicate that, in order to overcome false identification with the body and ego and experience the inherent wellbeing which is the nature of the Self, one of the necessary initial steps is **management of desires**. Participants' views were congruent with the *Bhagavad Gita* (ix.21) and *Kathopanishad* (i.iii.4-6) in identifying desire as a significant psychological barrier to experiencing true happiness. Desire and attachment were identified as the root cause of dissatisfaction and a barrier to progressing to Self-realisation.

Participants reported that they found stable and long-lasting psychological well-being could not be obtained by focusing on pleasure attainment. They had observed that desires lead to behaviours linked to the fulfilment of the desire, the achievement or non-achievement of which caused positive or negative emotions, but not lasting positive psychological states. This finding is presented in Fig. 8, 'The Origins of Distress' (p 149).

Implicit in this understanding is the potential for this knowledge to inform effective psychological practice. The *Bhagavad Gita* compares desire to a fire that is never satiated (iii.3) and elaborates in detail how the processes of desire and attachment lead to either mental dis-ease or unhappiness, depending on how they are approached. It states that a person who gives up all desires attains the peace of the Self. (iv.71). In recent IP research, Bhawuk

(2008a) has utilised this concept to create a useful model for psychology. However, few within the Western psychological paradigm have explored such concepts. Bhawuk believes the IP approach to desire can add value to many of the current research streams in mainstream, organizational and cross-cultural psychology.

Many participants suggest that, through self-reflection (*jnana* yoga), contemplation (*raja* yoga) and the practice of undertaking action without attachment to the fruits of that action (*karma* yoga), desires can be better managed, thus helping facilitate healthy management of the emotions.

Character and virtues – the foundation for psychological well-being

The Development of Virtue

Many participants emphasised that the development of virtue goes hand in hand with progress toward Self-realisation:

> *"The qualities, the values become a pre-requisite for realisation to happen."* (D3)

By practicing the values and attitudes that are natural to one who is Self-realized, those values eventually became natural and neutralised the previous habitual nature of no-longer-valued attitudes:

> *"Much effort is required at the beginning when we begin the path then it becomes more and more effortless."* (D7)

This participant described a man who practices values:

> *"He will have a soft voice, will have calmness on his face, simplicity, will be loving and lovable, soft and sweet with a regulated and disciplined life."* (D7)

Participants for whom values were a core characteristic of their way of life not only spoke of high levels of psychological well-being, but also saw themselves as agents of positive change. Character, they claimed, leads to inner peace and:

> *"When we have peace inside, harmony will radiate out to all those around us, bringing peace to our relationships, peace to our community, to our nation, and finally, to the world."* (G4)

The Indian textual lexicon concurs with this belief. The *Bhagavad Gita* expands on the need to eliminate vices and to make an effort to manifest and develop divine qualities. These enable the aspirant to unite with the Self (xvi.1-24). The story of Nachiketas in the *Katha Upanishad* is centred on the significance of virtues, such as kindness, in the process of realising the lasting peace and happiness of the Self (Swami Nikhilanada, 2008). This has the power to inform effective psychological intervention and is consistent with outcomes of research in the positive psychology field.

Seligman (2002), an advocate of positive psychology, found that good character was consistently and strongly linked to lasting happiness. He describes a loss of consciousness arising from acts of altruism and kindness: *"kindness ... consists in total engagement and loss of consciousness*" (p.9). Similarly, the findings indicate that in dis-identification with the ego self, there is potential to create positive states. Both the findings and positive psychology have identified the practice of altruism as significant in moving beyond individual identity to identification with the universal Self.

Prevention researchers have also discovered that human strengths, such as courage, optimism, faith, hope, honesty, perseverance and insight, act as buffers against mental illness (Jarden, 2012; Lyubomirsky, 2008; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). They conclude that fostering virtues and character may have the direct effect of preventing many of the major emotional disorders, as well as actualising high human potential. The positive psychology movement suggests that we are "evolutionarily predisposed toward certain virtues; that virtues have a biological basis." (Peterson & Seligman, 2004)

The emergent theme of the importance of **character and values** supports the growing evidence that ethics and virtues have significance for the discovery of happiness (Bentham, 1978; Kubovy, et al., 1999; Seligman, 2002). Happy people have been profiled as being full of love, humility and caring; as being unbounded by their own ego; and being more interested in giving than getting (Harvey & Chymis, 2004).This could be a description of any one of the participants, whose lives are seemingly characterised by unending selfless service and who commonly described themselves, like D14, as experiencing:

" ... heightened states of love, joy and peace."

Other participants, in describing their lives, say:

"I have become ever happy, ever joyful, ever blissful; everything is full." (G3)

"I am always blissful." (G9)

"We realise the infinite joy and boundless peace that come from within." (G4)

An increasing number of psychological researchers conclude that the fostering of virtues and character may have the direct effect of preventing many major emotional disorders and actualising high human potential. Wallis (2005) states that one proven 'happy practice' is to perform acts of kindness or altruism. A number of recent scholars have confirmed that altruism relates positively with happiness levels (Konow & Early, 2007; Lyubomirsky, 2008, 2010; Phelps, 2001). The Dalai Lama also emphasises the practice of compassion as necessary for happiness (Dalai Lama & Cutler, 1998).

Such compassion and altruism were evident throughout my field observations. It was this overflowing compassion that caused participants to conduct service wherever they went, that

caused them to rush to areas of natural disaster or set up schools, orphanages, medical clinics or rural development projects as a natural result of going on a *yatra* [45] (see Appendix A).

The motivation for such service seems to come from an inner state, which prompts action that emphasises character through service. This then appears to have led to the state of happiness demonstrated by the participants. The research of Frey and Stutzer (2002) and Csikszentmihalyi (1999) suggests that such types of people, who are intrinsically motivated, defining what they value for themselves, are happier than those motivated by extrinsic incentives.

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) stress the importance of creating a science of human strength (possibly demonstrated by a sense of social conscience – my interpretation) whose mission is to understand and learn how to foster virtues. He believes that psychologists need to call for massive research on human strengths and virtues.

This study could be seen, in part, to address this plea. The results support the call for continued research on prevention of psychological ill-health through the fostering of character and virtues. There is clearly a convergence between the ancient pathway of Indian spirituality and the conclusions of many Western psychologists, particularly those within the positive psychology movement, in identifying the relevance of character in psychological well-being. As one participant explained:

> *"We must be like the sun that is always giving without any discrimination and hesitation. This is the way to merge the ego with the divine 'I' and become peaceful and ever blissful."* (G4)

Such happiness, participants found, leads them onwards toward psychological well-being and Self- realisation.

[45] Spiritual pilgrimage

Pranamaya Kosh–a – the vital sheath

From pride and egoistic behaviour to humility and the desire to serve others

Ego Transcendence is necessary: how real is the ego?

The findings indicate that, at the level of the vital sheath, the **ego sense** presents a critical challenge that must be met through a **transcendent process**. Participants recognised the ego as being synonymous with all the ways they are consciously and unconsciously identified to, as well as being attached to, relative dimensions of the self that inhibit higher development. They also recognised it as being responsible for many of the psychological problems presenting today. Ego transcendence was found to be essential for both psychological well-being and the discovery of one's full potential through identification with the Self.

The study indicates that the nature of ego is essentially conceptual, in that the self-sense is seen as arising from the identification of awareness with a constellation of thoughts. This experience is also described with great clarity by Erickson (1970) as well as Wilber (1986), who defines ego as a constellation of self-concepts, along with the images, fantasies, identifications, memories, sub-personalities, motivations, ideas and information related or bound to the separate self-concept.

The participants identified that their experience of the process of Self- realisation required the ability to go beyond the ego with its roles and personalities. In this way space manifests, within which the deeper Self is revealed. The dissolution of the ego's obsessive, internal pre-occupations with its psychosomatic complexes allows the attention to directly focus on the true reality, free of assumptions, enabling the participants to perform actions without a **sense of 'doer-ship'** or attachment to the outcome.

Such ego transcendence, as a result of shifting the deepest sense of identity to the Self (abiding as the foundation of being), was an integral theme through almost all interviews. It facilitated the progress to higher states of awareness and well-being:

"... I am no longer a false and weak identity struggling for power, success and wealth, but a lasting channel of divine power and joyous witness of its beauty." (G1)

In the transcendence of identification with the body and ego, anger, lust and greed, and their ensuing behaviours and resulting unhappiness were also overcome:

"It is not because the person is inherently wrong that they do not experience happiness, it is simply false identification with the body; in essence the Self is goodness personified. When the ego falls into the background, what comes to the fore is overwhelming joy, happiness, peace and inherent freedom." (D6)

Selfless Service

As identified and associated with **character and virtue,** selfless service may also be seen as a manifestation of ego-transcendence. For the participants, this aspect allowed them to find a sense of losing themselves in the service of something larger. This is consistent with the outcomes of many other 'happiness studies' (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) illustrating the concept that greater meaning in life (and accordingly a greater sense of happiness) appears to arise from this virtue.

Recent research in neuroscience (Lutz, Brefczynski-Lewis, Johnstone, Davidson, & Davidson, 2008) identifies a specific area of the prefrontal cortex of the brain that is associated with states of happiness. It has been found that the levels of activity in this happiness area of the brain increase significantly when there is a compassionate meditative focus. There is clearly an inextricable link between one's personal happiness and kindness, compassion and caring for others. As one participant joyfully exclaimed when asked about his service projects, *"To live is to give!"* (G4)

Such joy, commonly experienced by the participants, arises not from the possession of outward things, but in the realisation of the Self, and is an expression of their inner nature.

Appendix A lists the considerable service activities in which participants have been involved. In many cases this does not indicate the full extent to which their lives are typically, selflessly dedicated to a higher purpose. For example, G10, as a revered spiritual leader, was reticent to provide any information about specific service projects he was involved in, yet is tirelessly fulfilling the social demands on his time.

Selfless service (*karma* yoga) is an emergent theme in the study and aligns with concepts from the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Upanishads*. It has been identified as a core practice on the path to Self-realisation, eventually becoming a spontaneous expression of the inner Self. Therefore this aspect of IP is worthy of further investigation for its contribution to an effective psychology for the future.

Manomaya Kosha – the mental/emotional sheath

From addictions and instability of mind to peacefulness and equanimity

Within the model, the aspects of the mental emotional sheath have the potential to be in a state of either instability or equanimity. The emergent themes of **mental/emotional self-mastery** allow for the essential stability that is required in overcoming conditions (such as addiction, depression and obsessive behaviour) that are a major challenge to psychological practice worldwide. It would appear that IP has potentially much to contribute to psychological practice with regard to how emotional stability can be created. If a therapist attempts to eliminate negative feelings, there is a potential to destroy the fundamental basis of the human being (Whitfield, 2009).

Rather than seeing themselves as an isolated entity, the *self-sense* in participants appeared to have grown to transcend all dualism. The IP approach is to recognise unpleasant feelings and accept them, while at the same time being able to view them dispassionately. Feelings are seen as temporary experiences which will come and go. One takes responsibility for them, yet

the focus is on building strength and virtue. Mind, no longer controlled by external objects but resting in tranquillity, is liberated from the limited sense of self.

The progression from physical desire to mental instability is illustrated in the following chart (Fig.7), in which the results of uncontrolled desire are presented.

Its significance is linked to the clinical environment, where distress is common (Barlow, 2008). Current Western psychological approaches may benefit from this perspective being considered. This could potentially relate to the concept of 'emotional intelligence' (EI).

Fig 8: The Origins of Distress

Emotional Intelligence – a way to understand the origins of distress

The recent theory of EI emphasises the importance of understanding and controlling one's emotions as the defining factor of success or failure in life. The advocates of EI claim that it is a person's capacity to understand their own emotions as well as those of others that is important. The use of this knowledge helps them climb the 'ladder of success' (Goleman, 1998).

The emergent themes of **desire and attachment**, as well as **mental-emotional self-mastery,** in the current study, allow more insight into the value of recognising the nature of emotions. In this, they are indicators to potentially effective processes for overcoming emotional instability, which can complement such modern psychological theories as EI. As two participants described the benefits of an IP approach:

> *"When they [desire and attachment] have no roots in our being, then we are free, tremendously free."* (G7)

> *"My whole life turned more objective - there is clarity mentally and emotionally."* (D3)

The results of this study have much in common with the concepts elaborated by modern IP thinkers in their emphasis on the value of Self-realisation for the emancipation from desire and the ability to respond to life's challenges with objectivity and clarity (Bhawuk, 2009; Paranjpe, 2010). They offer what could be termed 'an indigenous cultural mechanism' to work with desire and emotion and go beyond them. Bhawuk (2010a, pp. 49-93) states the case for greater cultural understanding when he says, "*quality cross-cultural research demands that we welcome indigenous models and theories that question our contemporary values and beliefs.*" More research is needed to determine whether the IP model is empirically testable and valid cross-culturally.

Vijnanamaya Kosha – the higher mental (discriminating) sheath

From mental disturbance to Self-knowledge, understanding and discriminating wisdom.

In the process of Self-realisation, participants came to a stage where discrimination between reality and impermanence was prominent. Their realisation that the ego is essentially unreal (*mithya* in Sanskrit) is a valuable one that has important implications for psychological theory and practice. The findings indicate that seeing the material world as 'real' is a significant cause of psychological suffering and pain. To know the universal Self as the only true reality, and all else as temporary, is the cause of high levels of psychological well-being.

A short explanation of 'mithya'

Essential to understanding the process of Self-realisation is the concept of *mithya*, which is an abstruse and difficult abstract idea at the core of Vedic teachings. This concept could be explained as everything in the perceived universe as being neither 'true' nor 'untrue' but something in between. In this concept, the truth and 'untruth' are seen as acting concurrently within our perception. That which is untrue has no permanence, whereas that which is true is always there, despite our perceptions (Sathya Sai Baba, 1972). Within the everyday human state, *mithya* is evident. It is described in the Indian textual lexicon as a state of forgetfulness: *"It is as if fire has forgotten its capacity to burn or water its nature to wet, man is unaware of the Truth of the Universe of which he is a part …"* (Sathya Sai Baba, 1967, pp. 99-102)

For participants to discover lasting happiness, it was important for them to recognise the relative reality of the material world (*mithya*). Existential and psychoanalytic schools have identified that the ego perceives itself as an isolated entity, unalterably separate from the remainder of the universe and locked in a perpetual and insurmountable struggle with both psychodynamic and existential forces (Bettelheim, 1982). While it may adjust to, and cope with, these conflicts and limits and their attendant suffering, it can never ultimately escape them at this level of consciousness.

Many psychological approaches, such as Freudian psychoanalysis, existentialism and behaviourism, recognise this problem but not the possibility of states in which it is no longer operative (Walsh & Vaughan, 1993). From this perspective, the human condition is seen as a no-exit situation to be met with courage, authenticity, problem solving, and acceptance.

The participants, through recognition and overcoming of the super-imposition of the individual ego self on the universal Self, find relief from suffering. Their experience points to the value of seeing life and circumstances as a 'relative reality' and, therefore, the possibility of a more detached outlook. This, in turn, leads to more clarity and equanimity, less reactivity and the ability to make better judgements. The mind is no longer controlled by external objects and this allows the inherent happiness of the Self to be experienced. As one participant put it: *"By knowing that all is the play of the mind, 50 per cent of the problem (of realising the Self) is solved. By meditation, the other 50 per cent is gone." (D7)*

Self-knowledge (a product of discrimination) is a critical factor in overcoming severe mental disturbances

Participants were engaged in a process of discrimination which led to their conviction, through reasoning and experience, that they were not the limited ego self. Their energy became increasingly focused on knowing the Self, which was discovered to manifest as happiness and love. It is the search for this unqualified happiness that causes many seekers from the West to travel to India. Several practitioners in the study talked of the exponential influx of Westerners to India, all suffering forms of sub-clinical depression together with a profound sense of emptiness, in spite of being materially wealthy in comparison to their Indian counterparts:

> *"In India you're used to seeing misery in people who are starving, or sick and unable to get medical care. Misery in wealthy or middle class families occurs when someone has died, or there's been a life event that has proceeded and caused this misery.*

Otherwise you don't see it. You never hear an Indian say 'I don't know why I am depressed.' 'I don't know why, but my life feels empty.' 'I've got everything but I can't sleep at night.'" (D6)

The findings indicate that this psychological well-being can be attributed to a connection to the Self. Indian psychology gave the participants a profound sense of connectedness, which expressed itself in a sense of fullness, happiness and love, as opposed to feelings of emptiness, depression and anxiety. Many had spent long periods living alone in remote areas, yet did not feel lonely, as a result of this sense of connection. In discovering the Self as the source of love, the feeling of 'lack' which leads to mental disturbances, had been transformed into a feeling of fullness and wholeness. There was nothing they needed from the world to provide a sense of inner well-being.

Anandamaya Kosha – the blissful sheath

From psychopathy and sociopathy to true happiness and pure love of the Self

Severe mental illnesses (such as those that lead to psychopathy and sociopathy) can occur as a result of a sense of isolation and separateness. They can also be attributed to a lack of character leading to a dearth of morality, especially in making a judgement about what is right and wrong and what is acceptable behaviour in society (Hare, 1993). This is essentially opposite to the high levels of the development of virtue and non-dual awareness that are a result of IP practices.

Blissfulness can be interpreted as a product of the process of transcending dualism and abiding in the consciousness of the Self. All participants demonstrated the ability to become aware of the unity and mutual interrelatedness of all things, transcending the notion of the isolated individual self and identifying themselves with a greater reality. The experience of ego transcendence is one in which the dichotomy of dualism, of separation between self and others and between self and the One Reality, is overcome:

"I see everything as myself." (G3)

"You see everywhere outside the same consciousness." (G2)

"Everything is the Self, is God. The sky, earth, mountain, river, animals, humans, all is God, parts of God." (G10)

From this experience, happiness arises. **Happiness as the essential nature** is an emergent theme of the study. Participants typically described their lives as being infused with joy, love, peace and bliss, as they overcame the sense of themselves as isolated entities. It would appear that psychological disturbance may attend any state of consciousness where exclusive identification results in a self/not-self dichotomy and that, conversely, psychological health may reflect the degree of the conscious relinquishment of this sense of duality.

For participants, it is the illusion of separateness which leads to the experience of fear, anxiety and depression. Conversely, the psychological stance, in which *the other* is now seen as *the Self*, has the potential to lead to a sense of blissfulness, inner freedom, unconditional love, non-violence and harmony in all relations. It appears that the more inclusivity, the greater the degree of health and freedom from psychological maladies.

Participant D11 was certain that, as long as he immersed himself in the consciousness of universal Self, his needs would all be provided. He said that his *kutir*[46] had been built for him by others, when he was found living under a plastic shelter on the side of the river. Sufficient supplies of food somehow always reached his dwelling before the snows trapped him for the winter season. This, he stated, was proof that the Self provides and there is no need for fear about getting our needs met. Although he knew there was no guarantee that the business man from Delhi who had provided for his needs the previous year would do so again, he harboured no anxiety for his future well-being. This confidence in the harmonious and

[46] Hut

benevolent patterning of life, once one connects with the consciousness that is the Self, was common among participants.

Akhilananda (2005) observes that anxiety and apprehension constitute one of the most significant psychological challenges faced by many people today. They can lead to a multitude of disorders such as insomnia and neuroses, and functional diseases such as heart trouble, circulatory disturbances and glandular difficulties. He suggests that if a worldly perspective can be subordinated to knowledge of the inner Self, it is possible to live free from anxiety; if the principle of the oneness is applied in practical living, one can strike at the root of fear.

This is supported by the IP literature. The *Katha Upanishad* (ii.i.4) explains it is misidentification with the ego self that creates fear. Similarly, the *Bhagavad Gita* emphasises that through knowing the Self, fear is transcended: "*To constantly know the Self is to remain fearless.*" (xvi.i.15). One participant described it as follows:

> *"... absolute trust arose when I became convinced that my existence is not separate from the universal Self."* (G1)

I observed this spirit of fearlessness in fourteen of the participants, such as D12, who confidently expressed his intention to stay through the winter in his mountain cave, despite difficulties such as an apparent inability to receive the food, clothing or bedding needed to withstand the sub-zero temperatures; G5, a middle-aged woman who has spent twelve years roaming fearlessly in the high Himalayas; and G6, who appeared to be unaffected when his ashram was washed away and began to clear away the rubble with equanimity and a smile.

The lives of such participants demonstrate the possibility that when there is identification with the consciousness of the Self, fear disappears. Such fearlessness is associated with faith in the omnipresence, love, mercy and protection of the universal Self. This was perhaps most

clearly evident in the life of G13, who fell fifty metres down a crevasse when leading a mountaineering group and was left to perish, due to rescue deemed impossible. With indomitable faith, he inched his way out of that "*well of death*" with mantra and prayer.

These findings suggest that the spiritual experience of oneness provides a perspective which mitigates fear and anxiety; decreases vulnerability to the disappointments, frustrations and traumas associated with physical existence; and supports psychological balance through an experience of the blissful Self.

Psychological and therapeutic implications

Integral wholeness is a product of the process of realising the Self.

The unitary nature of the Self-experience appears to have been overlooked by many psychological theories which have concentrated on various external aspects (Whitfield, 2009). Scientific ideas about human beings have often tended to fragment and 'compartmentalise' us. In contemporary psychology, the Self is seen to be located in a biological body and consciousness in neurological activity (Dennett, 1992).

A significant trend in science-based psychology and psychiatry relies on analysing aspects of the personality, focussing on the 'parts' and not the 'whole', thus ending up without an understanding of the wholeness that is the integral human. This is reflected in the present-day lack of any unifying theory or 'paradigm' in empirical or analytical psychologies, which have a multiplication of schools and sub-disciplines (Priddy, 1999).

Whitfield (2009) suggests that non-dualism can provide a unifying paradigm within which the various Western approaches and Indian spirituality can complement each other. She discusses the effect of a non-dualistic understanding on her practice as a Jungian analyst:

> "*To know that the core of the patient is, in fact, my Self gives a level of intimacy with and 'knowing' of the patient that otherwise would not be there.*" (p.29)

> *"To know that the Self of the patient, the source of love, underlies his or her pain and is indestructible gives me, the therapist, a depth of confidence and trust in the therapeutic process that asks the patient to go through the pain rather than run from it. The Self is there, like the sun, waiting behind the clouds."* (p.29)

Could it be possible that the unitary paradigm of IP may contribute to a holistic paradigm, within which all schools could find a place? Is it feasible that such a paradigm could also assist in stemming the sharp increase in the rate of depression, anxiety and insomnia in the West? (Boyd, Gullone, Kostanski, Ollendick, & Shek, 2000; Lambert, 2006; Murphy, Sobol, Neff, & Oliver, 1984; WHO, 2013)

Those approaches to psychological practice that are more closely connected to that of IP have considered the possibility of multiple neurobiological consciousness, corresponding to different brain domains (Crich & Koch, 2003a). However, in spite of many advances in neuroscience, this discipline has been unable to adequately understand or explain the unitary consciousness experienced by participants. The dominant view of neuroscience that consciousness is an emergent product of the brain has been repeatedly questioned (Crich & Koch, 2003b; Dennett, 1992; Jeanmonod, 2011).

While there is convergence in the data and concepts of neuroscience and IP, it is becoming more apparent that the practices of IP can bring about an experiential understanding of the states of consciousness which neuroscience is seeking to comprehend. The understanding of the nature of consciousness, when aligned to the experience of spiritual practitioners, could be seen as the place where neuroscience ends and IP practices begin.

This study provides emergent evidence that suggests that the approaches found in IP have the potential to enable a practitioner to transcend all the sheaths (*koshas*) in a systematic manner and experience the consciousness of the Self. IP practices clearly have the ability to show

how consciousness may be experienced in a practical way. In this manner, the experience of IP practitioners can contribute to scientific debate. It can also assist in the creation of a theoretical framework, based on both knowledge and experience, relating to the pure consciousness of Self-realisation and current scientific thinking, within a non-dual paradigm.

Can Indian and Western Psychologies benefit each other?

There are clearly several ways in which Indian psychology and Western psychology can benefit each other. Many participants noted the increasing number of Westerners arriving in India searching to overcome a sense of emptiness. Needleman (1977) noted that many Westerners no longer know whether they need spiritual or psychological help. While therapy is often sought for removing the obstacles that stand in the way of personal happiness, the spiritual practices integral to IP promote virtues such as compassion, transformative insight into mental and emotional conflicts and changes in the experience of personal identity.

Is it possible that both approaches can complement and benefit each other? Over the past four decades there has been growing interest in the potential use of meditative practices in psychotherapy (Davis & Hayes, 2011; Epstein, 2004; Germer, Siegel, & Fulton, 2005; Murphy & Donovan, 1983; Plante, 2009; Smith, 1975), leading to dialogue over the confluences and divergences of the two traditions (Claxton, 1986; Pargament, Magyar-Russell, & Murray-Swank, 2005; Richards & Bergin, 2005; Tarakeshwar, Stanton, & Pargament, 2003; Welwood, 1983). Although transpersonal psychologists have done important work in comparing Eastern psychologies and the Western view of the self as a separate and distinct person with a unique identity (Engler, 1998; Epstein, 2004; Russell, 1986; Wilbur, 1986) much of the work is dated. However, this study demonstrates that it may still have validity, particularly in illuminating how psychotherapy and Eastern disciplines might inform and assist one another. To date, a predominant focus has been Buddhism and meditation practices. Only recently has there been a call to investigate the way

in which IP as a holistic science can potentially benefit and transform Western psychology (Rao, Paranjpe, & Dalal, 2008).

The practices undertaken by the participants assisted them in understanding mental processes and preoccupations, and in shaping or controlling them. They facilitated the development of the ability to dis-identify with the personalities and roles of the ego self, foster the 'observer' stance and experience the unconditional love that comes with non-dual awareness. The practices changed customary patterns of perception and thinking, as well as motivation, lessening the intensity of motivations connected with the ego. There was a notable reduction of negative psychological symptoms when taking up the practices and way of life associated with the concept of unitary awareness – the basis of IP.

The value of Western psychological approaches in supporting the process of Self-realisation

While Whitfield (2009) concedes that the solution to negative symptoms as emotional pain and suffering lies ultimately in Self-knowledge, she discovered in her practice that there are psychological obstacles to gaining this Self-knowledge. She believes that a relationship between Eastern and Western psychology is meaningful for both. She noted that most of her patients found both Vedantic meditative techniques and cognitive practices useful, but each was not sufficient by itself. Unconscious complexes tended to linger. She upholds that a synthesis between Vedanta and in-depth psychology is important.

Cunningham (cited in Black, 2006) also believes that various Western psychological approaches, including psychoanalysis, can complement Indian spirituality by directly facilitating the experience of the 'one reality'. This can be achieved not only by removing impediments to this perception, but also by actively promoting qualities necessary for spiritual growth. However, he places significant value on the need for connection to the Self in order to achieve well-being.

Some teachers of Eastern meditation have found that WP is "quicker and more successful" in addressing many areas such as communications skills, maturation of relationships, sexuality, career and work issues. According to Wilber (1986), Eastern psychology is not a method for delving into unconscious material, but rather a way of facilitating emergent growth and the development of higher consciousness. It, therefore, may benefit from WP's expertise in certain circumstances.

The findings indicate an agreement with this synthetic approach, in that IP disrupts the exclusive identification with the levels of ego development, but repression of unconscious material may occur. Evidence emerging since the initial interview phase of the study indicates that this may indeed be an issue. The case of one of the participants (a guru) who had progressed to higher levels of consciousness, but appears to have repressed his sexuality (with resultant scandalous revelations), would support the idea that the unconscious may still be an issue in psychological health and may hinder the process of Self-realisation. Bacher (1981) identified unresolved anger as a key element in resistance to progress in meditation, which suggests that psychological and spiritual growth are linked, perhaps sequentially and developmentally.

However, the IP approach involves much more than just meditation. It implements a wide range of practices in everyday life and many participants consider these to have the ability to address anger issues at their core. There is perhaps a danger in drawing conclusions from research outcomes of a single IP practice, such as meditation, rather than the integrated approach of the four yogas outlined in this study. In saying this, although there is much evidence in the findings which suggest that IP is holistic in itself and may not benefit from having WP as an adjunct, this is not conclusive. On returning to one participant at the end of the study for feedback, it was discovered she had suffered a psychological break-down and was being cared for in an ashram hospital. Although limited information was available, it

appeared that unresolved family issues prior to her becoming a renunciate had resurfaced when her vow to remain in the Himalayas for fourteen years was complete. As an area of current debate, the value of WP in supporting the spiritual process requires further focused research.

The value of Indian psychology for Western psychology

It could be argued that the nature of the Self-realised person as described by participants is, in fact, a description of the ideal personality, sought after by psychotherapists (Barlow, 2008; Whitfield, 2009). Desire is replaced by inner happiness and fullness, and acceptance of 'what is' leads to mental and emotional freedom from worldly circumstances. Within this process, an orientation to serving and uplifting others becomes evident and it appears that great joy arises from seeing everything in the world as connected. The findings indicate that, when the deeper Self is emphasised and the hold of the ego self-diminished, the foundation is set for healthy personality organization.

Often, WP tends to focus on emotions, thoughts, memories, impulses, images, and self-concepts, all of which are contents of consciousness and fails to acknowledge that the observing self is located in awareness itself (Deikman, 1982). It tends to focus on the fulfilment of personal desires, while IP focuses on questioning and uprooting desire and attachment. When a change in the psychological state or attitude is brought about, there is a diminishment of the problems which are the focus of therapy. After a deeper awareness of reality is attained, individualistic pre-occupation decreases.

This was demonstrated in the orientation to selfless service that was evident in almost all participants. Is it possible that Western psychology can benefit from an understanding that the source of human suffering originates in ignorance of our true nature and that the experience of the deeper Self alleviates mental and emotional distress by removing this basis of ignorance?

We are now at a crucial evolutionary crossroad in the field of psychology. As a result of developments in multidisciplinary areas, there is likely to be the collapse of the materialistic paradigm that has dominated world thought for many centuries (Atwood & Maltin, 1991). With the impact of the new physics, systems theory and many other conceptual revolutions, the old theoretical structures have begun to crumble. "*Solid matter dissolves into waves of probability and the new physics seems to be approaching the mystic vision of the seers and sages.*" (p. 371)

For these reasons, there is the need for a new philosophy, a new paradigm and a new model for psychology relating to an individual search for inner peace and the deeper Self. "*We must move toward a realisation of the truth at the core of our being, and toward the higher consciousness that is the birthright of each of us."*(p. 371) The question remains: can this vision of transforming psychology be realised as a synthesis of WP and IP?

Synergy between East and West: Can they be combined?

It could be argued that IP practices may be a good primer for therapy. These practices enabled participants to step outside previous conceptual limitations and, in this way, change their reactions and behaviours. The desire for deeper self-understanding, that is inherent in taking up spiritual practices, has the potential to aid the therapeutic process and has been found by Kutz, Borysenko and Benson (1985) to intensify Western psychotherapy. The interweaving of the core practices of IP (*jnana, bhakt*i, *karma* and *raja* yoga) deeply involves the individual practitioner in the process of self- examination *or* investigation and provides abundant material for exploration in therapy sessions.

Both WP and IP assume that understanding one's pain and defences can alleviate suffering and promote psychological growth. Although it is claimed by Kutz et al. (1985, pp. 1-8) that IP and WP are "*technically compatible and mutually reinforcing",* it has yet to be tested. This study has the potential to be utilised for framing the way forward.

Others, such as Wolman (1985), have disagreed with this conclusion, seeing that the orientation of IP (the realisation that the ego self is illusory) is irreconcilable with the therapeutic goal of facilitating development of a cohesive ego. He cautioned that the developmental stages of patients must be carefully considered before combining Western and Eastern approaches.

In a similar, but different vein, Engler (1998) questions whether or not the goals of these two approaches are mutually exclusive and suggests that one might be the precursor of the other, concluding that *"You have to be someone before you can be nobody."*(p. 122) He states that meditation practices may only be effective for persons who have achieved an adequate level of personality organisation, and may be deleterious for those with personality disorders, particularly when there is a poorly-defined and weakly-integrated representation of self and others. It should, therefore, not be seen as a viable or possible remedy for autistic, psychopathic, schizophrenic, borderline or narcissistic conditions.

In Engler's view, there is a mutual exclusivity between a meditative approach (aiming to diminish the ego) and a psychotherapeutic approach (aimed at ego strengthening). He argues that, at any given time, there should be a striving to attain a coherent self or, alternatively, to attain liberation from the sense of separate self (p. 48). He warns that bypassing the developmental tasks of identity formation and object constancy, through a misguided attempt to annihilate the ego, can have pathological consequences.

Jungian and psychoanalytic critics would agree, suggesting that using meditation in the context of therapy is no substitute for the exploration of psychological-emotional issues stemming from the individual's personal history, which is the focus of most psychotherapies (Russell, 1986). To be effective therapeutically, meditation would have to be practiced in a way that does not pursue expanded states of consciousness as a form of 'spiritual bypassing' of emotional, interpersonal or intra-psychic conflicts (Welwood, 1980).

Epstein (2004) disagrees with contentions that an Eastern psychology approach is only an appropriate therapeutic intervention for those already possessing a 'fully developed personality' and argues that it may play an effective role in the resolution of infantile, narcissistic conflicts. The findings would support this contention. The participants experienced the challenge of transcending the hold of the ego self and, at the same time, the challenge of overcoming the denials that supported the wishful image of the self. The findings support the development of an increasing ability to see life objectively and to see 'reality' without distortion.

This is evident in the emergent themes where an interweaving of the four yogas could possibly provide a framework for connecting with a deeper reality, that which possibly has less 'distortion'. Each participant's description of the importance of that amalgamation shows this clearly: knowledge from self-enquiry and study – ***jnana yoga***; fostering of an attitude of love and surrender – ***bhakti yoga***; an orientation to selfless service (where actions are done without attachment to the outcome–) – ***karma yoga***; and the meditation path – ***raja yoga***. The holistic nature of their practices and way of life could very possibly overcome any dangers arising from a sole reliance on meditation, such as those discussed by Wolman (1985) and Engler (1998), when the unsubstantial nature of the ego-self becomes apparent.

The results of this study suggest there may be limitations as well as dangers in taking one practice in isolation (e.g. meditation) and attempting to assess the benefits of Eastern psychology on this basis. The findings reveal that the practice of IP is far more than just the practice of meditation. They present possibilities for the development of a holistic framework for psychological health (see Fig. 8). Included in these possibilities is the goal of ego transcendence and the attainment of higher states of consciousness and awareness, as well as the ability to overcome psychological issues which restrict the ability to fully engage in a positive manner with life and all its challenges.

The results of this study illustrate the way in which IP was effective in resolving conditions commonly treated by psychotherapists, such as anxiety and depression. The potential for a greater development of the personality, both within and beyond the ego-self, is revealed through the experience of the participants.

One participant described her 'miraculous' transformation from a state of pain, anger, confusion, doubt and fear, to one of profound happiness, when she began IP practices:

> *"In the months that followed, the Western psychodynamically-trained psychology student in me, the rational scientist in me, tried to find the doubts, the confusion and the fears again. So sure that I had simply repressed or suppressed it into an as-yet-unexamined layer of consciousness, I tried everything possible to make myself feel the confusion within myself once again. But it was not there." (D6)*

Another shared the pain and depression she had experienced before beginning IP practices. She described her previous life in the West as joyless, like:

> *"... chewing an old piece of wood."* (G7)

As she progressed in her practices, living simply with her guru on the river bank, she began to experience:

> *"... so much love it was overwhelming. I didn't know what to do with it."* (G7)

She stated that now (decades later) this experience of love:

> *"... is a little stiller now but has expanded and holds no boundaries."* (G7)

Depression was not a stranger to another participant before he decided to commit himself one hundred per cent to IP practices:

"I was very unhappy, I was very miserable, I was very depressed, things weren't going very well. I was full of doubt, I was full of all the kinds of anxiety and unhappiness that people suffer. I felt hatred and self-doubt." (G1)

He described how he became free of his psychological issues:

"... by leaping beyond the small confines of the separate self to participate in the life process in a much deeper and more authentic way." (G1)

One of the participants provided me with his autobiography, which described his background of drug addiction as a result of a deep sense of alienation from the materialistic values of America. He arrived in India as a youth, coming with a wave of such youngsters who were part of the counter culture in America. After taking up the life of a traditional spiritual practitioner, he went through an inner journey of awakening to the Self. He speaks of the *"ecstatic*" nature of his inner reality and the *"overflowing love"* that expresses itself in a multitude of social action projects as: *"... a loving servant of God".* (G11)

IP appears to have the potential to effectively help people out of their pathology, while WP could be considered to be good at understanding it. Although IP may not focus on delving into all the nuances of the unconscious, it is very effective in overcoming psychological issues. Behind the miraculous cures some participants experienced is a holistic science which, when taken up wholeheartedly, can lead to a high level of healthy psychological functioning. Two participants attempted to explain the difference. Their statements are reproduced in full, as they encapsulate the dichotomy (and the resolution of that dichotomy) between IP and Western psychology:

"The number of people that I've met who've been in therapy for a long time who can give a brilliant discourse on the nature of their alcoholism or the nature of their anxiety, what they're running from, what it indicates to them, where it comes from, the

first time they ever felt it, etc., is huge. The problem is the alcoholic is still drinking, the drug addict is still using, the person with anxiety still has anxiety, the anorexic is still anorexic. We [Wwestern psychologists] figured out how to take people down into their darkness. This is really the Western model, which says, 'stare your darkness in the face'. If you don't know what the root cause of your depression is, or the root cause of your anxiety is or the root cause of your phobia is, you can't be helped to move on. And so they [Western psychologists] take us down into darkness. 'Where did it come from? What are you really afraid of?' The problem is, once the darkness is looked at, Western psychology does not know how to turn us around and send us back up into the light and that's where the East comes in.

"The Eastern model is very weak on the insight aspect. I haven't met one Indian who's interested and this goes all the way from spiritual leaders to your general public. They're not interested in the root cause of the depression or alcoholism. What they're interested in is, 'you come here, we'll perform a yagna[47]' or 'you're going to give your alcoholism to Ganga and you're going to be free'. I remember the first time I heard it, I laughed. I thought, oh, this is really quaint, how cute, that these Indians think that people can just give their alcoholism to the river, like it were an albacore. I'm going to give my depression or my anxiety or my attachments or my childhood abuse or my failed marriage; I'm going to just give that to the river or I'll give it to the fire, like it is yesterday's trash and then I'll be free. And from an academic superior Western scholarly perspective it seemed really simplistic, infantile almost, what we call magical thinking that children have, and yet the baffling aspect is it actually seems to work, and this is where East meets West." (D6)

[47] Sacrificial fire

A second participant who attempted to describe the complementary approaches of East and West used the following analogy:

> *"You people in the West sit around in the dark room and you talk about how it feels to be in a dark room. You analyse how long it's been dark and you discuss what type of darkness it is and you each go around and you share your feelings of the darkness and you analyse what the molecules of darkness are like. In the East, we keep our mouth shut and we pat our hands against the wall looking for a light switch. That is the root difference. You people understand the darkness, but you're still sitting in it. We [Indians] may not know where the darkness came from, or how long it had been dark, what it felt like to sit in the dark, but at least we've managed to turn on the light."* (G4**)**

The findings demonstrate that the practice of IP can be very effective in changing negative psychological states into positive ones. It can bring about self-awareness of mental and emotional states, mastery over instinctive, compulsive reactions, insight into one's true nature and into reality, and expansion of ego consciousness into a more universal consciousness. The response of participants to stressful situations appears to be very adaptive, due to increased ability to let go of stress rather than remain chronically tense and anxious after the stressful period has passed. As mentioned before, this was evident in the guru who had just witnessed the destruction of his ashram by the Ganges River, but appeared full of equanimity.

The awareness which arises from IP appeared to provide a high sense of meaning and purpose in the lives of the participants. Consistent with research on individuals who had had peak experiences (Wuthnow, 1978), participants were also self-sufficient and relaxed, and demonstrated self-aware and self-assured personalities. The participants' words, recorded in this study, are striking in their beauty and depth of understanding.

Such results suggest that IP may have a role in transforming narcissism, feelings of emptiness and other forms of psychological malfunctioning. IP has the capability of moving the individual beyond the ego into a new stage of psychological development – the experience of Self-realisation.

In order for individuals to reach this new developmental stage it may be useful, as Atwood and Maltin (1991) suggest, for therapists to consider incorporating some Eastern therapeutic approaches as adjuncts to their more Western practices. The findings indicate that the practices of *jnana*, *bhakti*, *raja* and *karm*a yoga are effective in the process of removing the delusion of the separate self and the consequent unhappiness, allowing for the enjoyment of inherent love and contentment. Watts (Watts, 1961) in his book, *Psychotherapy: East and West*, professed that these spiritual practices are psychotherapies in disguise. Swami Rama, the founder of the Himalayan International Institute in the US, details how such practices have been used clinically to supplement or replace some of the less complete Western theories and techniques (Swami Rama, Swami Ajaya, & Ballentine, 1976).

What value does this ancient science have for our knowledge, understanding and practice of psychology?

According to Indian psychology, all activity, whether inner or outer, is striving for the experience of happiness and love. The experience of love and/or being loved is essential to the well-being of a person, and is our primary source of psychological healing. By connecting to the Self, the love that is needed to heal any psychological wounds can now be found in one's own depths, and its presence recognised even during the individual's most difficult trials. The Self, once experienced, becomes the individual's source of healing comfort. If the deeper Self remains untouched by the conditions of the mind, then the core of a person remains undamaged in spite of his or her psychological wounds. Such an understanding of

the Self also has the potential to give the therapist a model of the psyche that brings with it a new understanding of emotional pain and a means for its healing.

I believe that the integration of the concept and process of Self-realisation (as outlined in this study) into psychological theory and practice, and its models of consciousness, could enrich the current Western understanding of human nature. Indian psychology adds an emotionally, intellectually and spiritually satisfying dimension to our current understanding of human behaviour. It allows a new perspective on Maslow's theory of a hierarchy of needs (Koltko-Rivera, 2006) in which lower levels of need must be met before moving to the higher. In contrast, all participants emphasised self-transcendence as their primary motivation above all others.

Braud (2011) suggests ways in which the principles and practices of Indian spirituality can be introduced more fully into psychological research. This would allow such research and, by inference, psychology itself to be more inclusive, integrated and relevant to human psycho-spiritual concerns. He provides information on how this is being implemented into the curriculum of a graduate psychology programme at the Institute of Transpersonal psychology in California (Braud & Palmer, 2002).

Columbia University is also experimenting with integrating psychotherapy and spirituality in ways seldom seen in a major research university. They have created 'The Spirituality and Mind-Body Institute' "in order to conduct research and colloquia". Dr Miller, the professor who leads the Master's programme states she is training 'spiritual psychologists' who put non-material concepts, like love and connection, at the core of their efforts to heal. She bases the programme on moral principles which are universal and states, "*We can grow healthy and move past suffering if we don't simply look at ourselves as isolated, but as part of the greater consciousness of love"* (Otterman, 2012). Through the new institute, Dr Miller recently won a

private grant of $2.5 million to study depression and other disorders in late adolescence: problems she hypothesizes are spiritual in nature and can be treated with spiritual therapies.

The nature of psychology, its philosophical underpinnings and its practices are changing. However, there are still many lessons to be grasped. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) believe that the field of psychology has been neglecting its responsibilities to improve those who are not afflicted with mental illness. They discuss this in depth in the introduction to the January 2000 issue of the American Psychologist. *"Psychology is not just a branch of medicine concerned with illness or health, it is much larger."* (pp. 5-14)

Humanistic and transpersonal psychologies may be seen as reactions to what was considered by some as an overemphasis on deficits and limitations and an under emphasis on growth and greater human potentials. A similar and more current reaction can be seen in the recent emergence of positive psychology within the field of psychology at large. In the last few years, some researchers began to focus on the health and well-being benefits of exceptional human experiences (Braud & Palmer, 2002). This study and its findings represent a step in a similar 'positive' direction and add to these efforts by outlining transformative approaches practiced by modern-day practitioners of Indian psychology.

These methods assist in providing a more inclusive view of physical, psychological and spiritual well-being. The findings of this study demonstrate that spiritual practices and experiences can help individuals evolve in awareness and develop greater meaning in life and an appreciation of their inner nature. This is achieved through fostering less identification with the ego and greater alignment with the Self. Cornelissen (2008b) is emphatic that the systematic use of such psycho-spiritual knowledge for the attainment of a higher consciousness must become part and parcel of psychological training and practice.

This would seem particularly important when we note the escalation of stress-related disorders in the modern world and the need for an effective psychology to address the root cause. The value of IP as a stress management tool, and a useful long-term strategy for developing a stress-resistant personality or lifestyle, is recognised in a wider sense by the psychology profession (Palsane & Lam, 1996). Its integration into modern psychological thought and practices could not be more timely, when we consider that recent empirical studies have shown that the increasing attainment of materialistic goals does not tend to result in increased happiness. This state is achieved by those activities and values which lead to connection with the fullness of the deeper Self (Diener & Diener, 1995; Horton, 2010; Milton, 2002; Oswald, 1997; Tricks, 2002).

A Teacher is Necessary - Can the guru-disciple relationship translate to Western psychology?

The realised master and the guru-disciple relationship

The findings suggest that having a realised master is essential in the process of Self-realisation. The *Upanishads* are emphatic about the need to be in the company of a guru in order to realise the Self. The literal meaning of the word 'Upanishad' is 'sitting near the guru' (Swami Nikhilanada, 2008, p. 11). The *Upanishads* view a guru as one who has crossed over the ocean of worldly existence and at the same time takes others across.

The *Kathopanishad* (Swami Nikhilanada, 2008, pp. 109-179) is built around the story of how Nachiketas (the disciple) is liberated by Yama (his guru). Yama states: *"Unless you learn of God from some Master soul you shall not experience Him."* Similarly, the *Chandogya Upanishad* (Nikhilanada, 2008, pp. 87-148) states: "*without a master soul we can neither know nor experience the true nature of the Self."* The *Manduka Upanishad* (Swami Nikhilanada, 2008, pp. 253-315) speaks of it in this manner: *"To know God, go to a guru who is adept in the knowledge of Brahman and is fully embedded in Brahman*." The central

theme of the *Bhagavad Gita* (Swami Shivananda, 2008) is how Arjuna (the disciple) is led by Krishna (the guru) to higher levels of spiritual understanding.

Both the resilience and the relevance of the ancient practice of the guru and his disciples were made clear by twenty-five of the twenty-seven participants, who confirmed the importance of this deeply intimate relationship in their own process. For them, the role of their guru was a far more complex one than that of just a teacher or preceptor. The relationship was transformational. Saraswati (1991, p. 29) describes it thus: *"If you say that the guru transforms the minds that are like brass into shining gold, it would not be an adequate measure of the true extent of the guru's greatness."*

Several researchers have attempted to explore this guru-disciple relationship for its applicability in a Western context. Hoeck (2002) suggests that the guru-disciple paradigm offers Western psychiatry a framework which is a viable alternative, in that it is a paradigm in which the authority in the therapeutic relationship is explicit, and in which the psychiatrist embodies the necessary values to facilitate transformation. *"For Westerners suffering from the chronic fatigue of individuality, the concept of the guru-chela[44] paradigm is near relief."(pp. 119-125)*

Kakar (1982) notes that the guru-disciple interaction touches deeper, more regressed layers of the psyche which are generally not touched by psychoanalysis. Transformation is believed to occur through a spiritual relationship: the guru's ability to instil faith and teach discrimination and control through spiritual surrender to God.

Even emerging contemporary spiritual therapeutic paradigms support surrender as a "*potentially adaptive coping style*" (Palovtzian & Park, 2005, p. 315). Kakar (1982, p. 240) argues that it is the sacred that links the guru "*with the malaise of the spirit",* enabling

him/her to act as a physician of mind and soul with objectivity and competence. The guru-chela paradigm has been proposed as most tenable for therapeutic work with Hindus.

Raina (2002), Moodley and West (2005) and Neki (1973) all suggest that the guru-chela relationship should run parallel to psychotherapeutic work, rather than in tandem with it. Just as "the guru takes the disciple (chela) through an experiential journey of self-exploration" (Moodley & West, 2005), psychological intervention can do the same to assess challenges and growth points for change. Where traditional therapies are needed, the practitioner can make referrals to a chosen guru or create therapeutic synergies with the Indian spiritual healing practices.

The blending of conventional and traditional therapeutic approaches is very possible as part of a holistic integrative plan, particularly when working with indigenous communities. Practitioners should try to embrace the qualities and approaches of traditional gurus (Moodley & West, 2005; Sollod, 2005). With the current surge towards spiritually-oriented practice, a myriad of opportunities exist to include the practices associated with the four yogas[48] as taught by traditional gurus, to effect healing in a spiritually-sensitive ethical way.

In spite of these efforts by Western practitioners, it needs to be seriously questioned whether it is possible to duplicate the guru-disciple relationship within a psychotherapeutic relationship. Numerous examples such as Bert Potter (Powley, 2012), Jim Jones (Chidester, 2003) and L. Ron Hubbard (Anonymous, 2013) attest to the dangers inherent in this, so a cautionary note must be sounded.

On the other hand, if we consider that the role of the guru is one of an educator, a facilitator and guide, who prescribes methods for outgrowing self-imposed limitations rather than engaging in a psychotherapeutic relationship, it could potentially influence the approach taken in the therapeutic relationship. The focus could orient towards assisting clients to

[48] *Jnana* (wisdom), *Bhakti* (devotion), *Karma* (service) and *Raja* (meditative practices)

recognise that within themselves is a wisdom they can deeply trust (the Self) to guide them to happiness and fulfilment.

Conclusion

Indian Psychology: An ancient paradigm for a new universal psychology?

This study indicates that the process of Self-realisation experienced by modern-day practitioners of Indian psychology is consistent with that described in ancient Indian literature such as the *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad Gita*. There is evidence that the core principles are still relevant within a modern context. Through overcoming identification with the ego self, transcending desire and attachment, cultivating virtues, and incorporating practices such as self-enquiry, devotion, meditation and selfless service under the guidance of a spiritual preceptor, participants are able to access their fundamental nature in a profound way. This has a transformative and positive effect on psychological well-being and quality of life, both individually and socially.

The results of the study indicate that IP presents a body of experience, teachings and techniques and a way of life that have addressed the core issues of the nature of a human being's awareness and suffering, the interrelatedness of the universe around them and pathways to peace and harmony. It does this by postulating the primacy of consciousness or Self and exploring the interface between the Self and ego identification. In doing so it has the potential to build conceptual, as well as disciplinary, bridges between science and spirituality. This potential encompasses the subjective and the objective, the personal and the transpersonal and the cognitive and trans-cognitive in the human condition.

It is becoming increasingly evident that some of the important concepts of Indian thought have a significant role in developing a comprehensive psychological science. Each of the many and varied paths and philosophies expounded in IP demonstrates that traditional IP thought is rich in content that is relevant to current psychological concerns around the world. It is possible these may provide a useful background for the emergence of a new discipline

which may appropriately be called 'spiritual psychology' or, as coined by Dalal (2000), a 'greater psychology' and form the basis for a psychology that is universal.

Dalal and Misra (2010b) believe that turning towards IP will certainly expand the arena of psychological enquiry and provide effective technologies for self-transformation, leading to a better quality of life. It would appear that the cutting edge and future of psychology must be found within such broader currents of holistic thinking.

The real value of IP will show itself when it is used not only for individual liberation, as it has tended to be in the past, but also for a comprehensive transformation of life, which is the promise of the future (Giri, 2010a). The challenge before IP is to contemporise its theories and practices, so that its relevance for a global transformative psychology can be realised.

This study indicates that the next stage of human development, one that takes into account a more comprehensive reality, is the stage that utilises IP to frame its transformative intention. Is it time for Western forms of psychotherapy to incorporate IP concepts into their theoretical models and practical application? Perhaps this could occur by acknowledging a final integrative stage of development – one of universal awareness. What it appears we need is not just a synthesis, but a dynamic interplay between mystical intuition (the Self-realisation found in IP) and scientific analysis (the method of exploration of WP).

The pressing need for a spiritually-informed psychology is illustrated in this study, which also identifies the corollary: the need for a psychologically-grounded spirituality. The integration of these two aspects emerging from the study will, I believe, establish the value of the synthesis of IP and WP as a framework for a global psychology.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Participant Profiles

Senior Practitioners

	Tradition	Age Group	Gender	Nationality	Role	Qualifications	Service Projects[1]
G1	Currently Independent. Background in various traditions including kriya yoga, Buddhist meditation, Poonja ji.	50+	M	American	Guru	None	
G2	Kailasa Brahmavidya Peeth (Swami Vidyananda Giri)	60+	M	Indian	Guru	Masters in Philosophy/Sanskrit	Free food/lodging and training in Advaita Vedanta for sannyasis
G3	Chidananda	60+	M	Indian	Guru	Unknown	Free food/lodging and training for sannyasis
G4	Brahmaswarupji	60+	M	Indian	Guru	Master's Degrees in Sanskrit and Philosophy	Various humanitarian activities including free schools, healthcare and medical camps , housing, sewerage and water systems, protecting girls from feticide and infanticide, youth welfare, vocational training schools, disaster relief, cow care, orphanages, traditional gurukulum, ecological and environmental initiatives
G5	Rama Krishna	50+	F	Indian	Hermit Practitioner	Master's Degree in Special Education	Education, counselling, tribal welfare.
G6	Shivanada	80+	M	Indian	Guru	Master's Degree in Philosophy	Hospital and treatment centre, leprosy treatment centres, disaster relief, free food distribution, homes for the poor
G7	Sri Masturam Baba	50+	F	English	Guru	None	Cancer care, hospice development

	Tradition	Age Group	Gender	Nationality	Role	Qualifications	Service Projects[1]
G8	Tapovan Maharaj	60+			Guru teacher	Engineering	Schools, medical clinics, free food distribution, disaster relief
G9	Hare Krishna	50+	M	Indian	Guru	Unknown	Feeding and educating children, disaster relief, food distribution
G10	Shankacharaya	60+	M	Indian	Guru	Master's degrees in Sanskrit and Philosophy	
G11	Hare Krishna	50+	M	American	Guru	None	Free food distribution to slum children, establishing hospitals, schools, an orphanage, eye camps, eco- friendly farms, emergency relief programmes.
G12	Samata Samashti Dharma	70+	F	Australian	Guru	None	Meditation training
G13	Tapovan Maharaj	80+	M	Indian	Guru	4th Standard	Environmental education, yoga in schools, meditation camps

Disciples

	Tradition	Age Group	Gender	Nationality	Role	Qualifications	Service Projects[1]
D1	Sathya Sai Baba	60+	M	Sri Lankan	Writer International Speaker	M.D.	Medical services in free hospital
D2	Sathya Sai Baba	60+	F	German	Artist	Masters in Fine Arts	Children's education, orphanage assistance
D3	Dayananda Saraswati	30+	M	Indian	Resident teacher in Vedanta training centre	Vedanta	Student education/hostels, disaster relief, values education
D4	Kashmir Avadhoot	50+	M	Indian	Teacher/writer	Film Producer	Food and clothing distribution, disaster relief
D5	Sathya Sai Baba	80+	M	Indian	Medical and Ayurvedic doctor	M.D.	Free ayurvedic consultations and yoga classes, social services
D6	Chidananda Maharaj	40+	F	American	Ashram administrator international speaker	PHD Psychology	Youth services, counselling individuals and families, disaster relief, teaching meditation, various humanitarian projects, environmental protection and preservation

	Tradition	Age Group	Gender	Nationality	Role	Qualifications	Service Projects[1]
D7	Sathya Sai Baba	60+	M	Indian	University lecturer Speaker Translator	Professor of Biology	
D8	Shivananda	50+	M	Indian		Unknown	
D9	Patanjali Yoga	40+	M	Indian	Yoga teacher	Unknown	
D10	Shivanada	50+	M	Indian	Yoga Teacher	Unknown	Spiritual Bookshop/food distribution/free lodging for renunciates
D11	Rama Krishna	50+	M	Indian	Hermit Renunciate	Masters Degrees	Healthcare, disaster relief, tribal welfare, education and culture
D12	Shiva	30+	M	Indian	Hermit Renunciate	None	
D13	Sathya Sai Baba	70+	M	Indian	Writer, speaker, Head of Media Centre	Professor/ex vice chancellor/Nuclear Physicist	
D14	Kriya Yoga	60+	M	Indian	Teacher	Unknown	Disaster relief, aged and handicapped care, rehabilitation, education, professional training and social services, healthcare for the poor.

1. Some of these details emerged during interviews, but many details have been since gathered and confirmed in various ways.

Appendix 2: Interview schedule

Interview Schedule

Topic: From the self to the Self

Part 1: Introduction to the study (approx. 10 min)

Introduction to the objectives and benefits of the study. Interview procedure. Answering questions from the participant regarding the research project.

Part 2: Interview (approximately three hours over two sessions)

Section 1: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS REGARDING PERSONAL PRACTICE

1. The Upanishads offer a detailed conceptual model of the psychological make-up of the individual, in which a clear distinction is made between the essential Self and the multiple selves, which belong to the ego. Please share your experience.
2. The main theme of the Upanishads is that the real Self is to be found within, and the goal of life is to discover it. In order to discover this self, one needs to understand the multi-faceted manifestations of consciousness, the aspects of personality related to each of the panch koshas (sheaths). What is your understanding of the process of self-realisation as it relates to the koshas?
3. Describe your progress from identification with the gross levels of consciousness to the progressively subtle levels, from the outer to the inner.
4. Describe the transcendence of each aspect of the personality, physical, social, vital, mental, emotional,
5. Describe in more detail the stages/processes of your own self-transformation.
6. The Upanishads state that renunciation of sense pleasure and worldly desires is required for self-realisation. Elaborate on your personal experience.
7. Whereas western psychology has focused on achieving personal goals, the Upanishads point to the necessity of transcending desire, attachment and egotism. Please elaborate on your own process.
8. Control of senses is considered in the Upanishads to be essential for self-realisation, as the senses have to be turned from the outer to the inner so that meditation is possible. What role has this played in your own practice?
9. What principles and techniques of mind and sense control have been important in your practice?
10. How important has the process of self-inquiry (Jnana yoga) been?
11. What importance have the practices of meditation, concentration and contemplation had in your own process?
12. Has devotion (Bhakti yoga) played an import role? What form has this taken?
13. What other practices have been important? Have these changed as you have progressed?
14. What have been the most important practices?
15. What are the most important elements of your spiritual practice? Have these changed over time?
16. At each level of self, there are challenges, which must be overcome order progress to a higher level of evolution. What are the biggest obstacle/challenges you have faced on the path?
17. How did you overcome them?

18. Have there been specific challenges been more prominent at certain stages? Please describe.
19. What are your biggest current challenges?
20. The practice of right living, (dharma) and the development of good character, morality and virtues is deemed necessary in the ancient scriptures to overcome bad habits and perfect the personality. Elaborate on the role these have played on your path.
21. Are there any other important principles you have had to develop?
22. What are the essential qualities required of you on the path?
23. How did you develop these?
24. In what way were/are you guided by an outer guru? How important has this been?
25. In what way have you been guided by the inner guru?
26. Has the relative importance of the inner and outer guru changed progressively over time?
27. Describe the psychological changes you have experienced which accompany the spiritual process.
28. Describe the physiological changes you have experienced which accompany the spiritual process.
29. The Atma (innermost self) has been described as the witness state, beyond the senses. Describe your experience of Atma.
30. Atma is also described as residing in the Hridaya, the spiritual heart. Is this consistent with your own experience?
31. How would you best describe your own experiences of self-realization and mergence?
32. What do you consider liberation or self-realization is?
33. How does this relate to experiences of higher states?
34. Is self-realisation something more? Describe?

SECTION 2: QUESTIONS ON THE APPLICATION OF SPIRITUAL PRACTICES TO SOCIAL CONCERNS

1. The Upanishadic model proposes that one can continue engagement in the world and yet strive towards liberation, however renunciation is often thought of as a rejection of worldly life. What does renunciation mean for you?
2. Have periods of intense sadhana (withdrawn from worldly life) been essential? If so to what extent?
3. How do the inner and outer worlds interface in your life?
4. Describe the evolution of any desire to develop service activities. Is this related to the expansion of identity so that it is more inclusive and encompassing?
5. What is the extent of your service activities (karma yoga)?
6. What importance do you place on service as a spiritual activity?
7. The Bhagavad Gita emphasizes the importance of performing actions without attachment and cultivating the attitude that one is not the doer. Elaborate on your personal experience.
8. How important do you see your role as teacher, guide, guru?

PART 3: Part 3: Follow-up interview (approx. 30mins) to enable the participant to contribute any extra material they wish, and for the researcher to clarify any points from the first interview.

PART 4: Post interviews discussion. (Saying thank you, reiterating confidentiality and debriefing) (Approx 10 min).

Appendix 3

Information Sheet: From the self to the Self

Jennifer Cottingham — **Masters Student**

James Liu — **Supervisor**

James.liu@vuw.ac.nz

+64 (4) 463-5153

What is the purpose of this research?

I wish to make a contribution to the expanding field of Indian psychology by conducting an empirical study in the application of ancient textual concepts (Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita) in the lives of modern spiritual practitioners.

Alignment with Upanishadic Truth benefits the participants; by making their experience available to a wider audience, psychologists; by exposing them to other ways of approaching perennial problems, such as: coping with stress, unhappiness and depression, finding meaning in life and lack of self-creativity; and spiritual aspirants; by having access to insights from the lives of those who have experienced self-realisation.

The study will not only add another dimension to growing research into Eastern psychological literature, but will provide an empirical study of the traditional system of Indian Psychology and spirituality as it is practiced in the modern day.

This study focuses on the process of self-transformation/self-realization and how this process is lived in daily life. The Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita provide a map of self-realisation which sees the development of the personality along a successive transcendence, until the essential nature is realised. This study will consider all the aspects in this progression, physical, social, energetic, mental, emotional, intelligent and transcendent, as well as the core practices, values and challenges. Areas of concordance and non-concordance (agreement or non-agreement) between personal experience and scriptural description in the Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita will be identified.

The relevance of this pathway for enhancing human potential and well-being, as well as the wider social impact that practitioners have on society will be considered.

Who is conducting the research?

I am Jenny Cottingham working on a Master's Thesis for Victoria University. I am doing research on the process of self-realization.

As a highly respected senior practitioner I would like to invite you to be part of the research. It is hoped that the information gained will be of great value and assistance to both Western and Indian seekers as well as make a contribution to the development of a psychological framework which encompasses the deeper aspects of the Self. You do not have to decide today whether or not you will participate in the research. Before you decide, you can talk to anyone you feel comfortable with about the research.

What is involved if you agree to participate?

This research will involve your participation in one semi-structured interview, as well as a follow-up discussion to supplement or clarify material from the interview.

We are asking you to help us learn more about the process of self-realization in the context of Indian psychology. We are inviting you to take part in this research project. If you accept, you will be asked to answer questions based on the following:

- Is the process of self-realisation still consistent with that described in the Upanishads?
- What is the experience of practitioners?
- What value does this ancient science have for our knowledge, understanding and practice of psychology?

Privacy and Confidentiality

- We will keep your consent forms and data for up to five years after publication.
- You will never be identified by name in my research project or in any other presentation or publication. The information you provide will be coded by number only.
- In accordance with the requirements of some scientific journals and organisations, your coded transcript may be shared with other competent researchers.
- Your coded data may be used in other, related studies.
- A copy of the coded data will remain in the custody of Jenny Cottingham
- The interviews and discussions will take place on your ashram or other suitable location. If you do not wish to answer any of the questions during the interview, you may say so and the interviewer will move on to the next question. No one else but the interviewer will be present unless you would like someone else to be there. The information recorded is confidential, and no one else except Jenny Cottingham will have access to the information documented during your interview. The entire interview will be tape-recorded, but no-one will be identified by name on the tape. The tapes will be kept in a safe for the two year life of the study and five years, following the completion of the study. The information recorded is confidential, and no one else except Jenny Cottingham will have access to the tapes. The research is expected to take two years to complete. During transcription, any names given will be altered to protect identity.
- You may withdraw from this study at any time and any materials will be deleted.

What happens to the information that you provide?

- Nothing that you tell us during the interview period will be attributed to you by name. The knowledge that we get from this research will be shared with you before it is made widely available to the public. Each participant will receive a summary of the results. Following this, the results will be published so that other interested people may

learn from the research.

- The data you provide may be used for one or more of the following purposes:
- The overall findings may be submitted for publication in a scientific journal, or presented at scientific conferences.
- The overall findings may form part of a Master's thesis that will be submitted for assessment.

If you would like to know the results of this study, they will be available approximately 2014 from the following sources:

Emailed to you
Posted to you
Discussed with you over the phone

If you have any questions, you can ask them now or later. If you wish to ask questions later, you may contact: James Liu email James.Liu@vuw.ac.nz phone 0091212109866

This proposal has been reviewed and approved by the ethics committee of Victoria University, whose task it is to make sure that research participants are protected from harm.

You can ask me any more questions about any part of the research study, if you wish to. Do you have any questions?
Your participation in this research is invaluable, thank you.

Jenny Cottingham

Appendix 4

Statement of consent

I have read the information about this research and any questions I wanted to ask have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to participate in this research. I understand that I can withdraw my consent at any time, prior to the end of my participation.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Email address: _____

Copy to:

[a] participant,

[b] researcher (initial both copies below)

I consent to having our discussion audio taped.

Signature: _____

I would like to receive the audio discussion. Yes/No (Please circle one)

I would like to receive a copy of the transcript. Yes/No

I would like to receive a copy of the results once the project is completed. Yes/No

Postal address:_____

_____

_____

Once findings from this study are put together, I would like a copy of the information

Yes / No.

If you selected yes to the previous question, please select (by circling a numeral below) how you would like to receive the findings.

(i) Emailed to me

(ii) Posted to me

(iii) Discussed with over the phone (please leave a phone number that you are likely to use in the next two years)

Phone: _____

Appendix 5

TE WHARE WĀNANGA O TE ŪPOKO O TE IKA A MĀUI
VICTORIA
UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

Debriefing statement

Once again, thank you for participating in this study about Self Realisation. I hope that this work will make an important contribution to the understanding of the process of self-realisation, This will benefit participants; by making their experience available to a wider audience, psychologists; by exposing them to other ways of approaching perennial problems, and spiritual aspirants; who can gain insights from the lives of those who have experienced self-realisation.

I have really appreciated working with you and your contribution will greatly enhance the purposes of this research.

Once again, thank you for participating in this research.

Appendix 6
Glossary

Advaita vedanta	An Advaita Vedantin is one who practises the philosophy of non-dualism
Advaita vedantin	One who practises the philosophy of non-dualism
Ananadam	Bliss
Anusaki	Non-attachment
Anusthan	Focused spiritual practice removed from worldly duties.
Arjuna	The warrior prince in the Bhagavad-Gita to whom Krishna expounds the nature of being, the nature of God, and the way humans can come to know God.
Ascetic	A wandering monk who has renounced all material and sexual attachments. Typically an ascetic will beg for food and not spend more than three days in any one place.
Ashram	A hermitage, monastic community or other place of spiritual retreat.
Atman/Atma	The unchanging eternal self, the experiencing witness
Avidya	Misunderstanding
Bhagavad Gita	A sacred Hindu text that is incorporated into the Mahabharata and takes the form of a philosophical dialogue in which Krishna instructs the prince Arjuna in ethical matters and the nature of God.
Bhakti yoga	Encompasses the devotional practices that open the heart to compassion and love for God
Bidi	Indian cigarette made from a rolled tobacco leaf
Brahman	The unmanifest aspect of the cosmos – pure undifferentiated consciousness
Buddhi	The faculty of direct spiritual awareness.
Buddhism	The religion that follows the teaching of Gautama Buddha (a teacher who lived around the 5th century BCE)

Chakra	Energetic centre of manifestation
Chela	Disciple
Consciousness	Awareness of being, in terms of identification of who we are, whether in relation to external or internal circumstances
Crore	Ten Million
Detachment	A perspective that creates balance in life, where there is no concern about losing or gaining, success or failure.
Dharma	Right Living
Ego	The part of identity that perceives itself as a separate entity
Egocentrism	Limited in outlook or concern to one's own activities and needs
Equanimity	Calmness, composure, and mental and emotional stability, especially under tension or strain
Gayatri mantra	One of the oldest Sanskrit mantras from the Rigveda which means 'May the divine light of the Supreme Being illuminate our intellect and lead us along the path of righteousness.'
God	Supreme Self
Guru	Spiritual teacher
Hindu	A diverse body of religion, philosophy, and cultural practice native to and predominant in India, characterized by a belief in a supreme being of many forms and natures. It views opposing theories as aspects of one eternal truth,
Homa	Fire worship ceremony
Hridaya	The spiritual heart
Ignorance	False concepts built by the intellect and a strong ego sense
Indian Psychology	The indigenous psychology of India which provides a detailed map of our inner being and the spiritual foundation of consciousness

Jainism	The religion that arose from the teachings of Mahavira (around 6th century BCE) based around ahimsa (non-violence)
Japa	Constant repetition of a mantra
Jiva	Individual Soul
Jnana yoga	The development of wisdom, dispassion and discrimination.
Karma yoga	The activity of selfless service and of contributing to society.
Ketra-ksetrajna vibhaga yoga	Knowing the field, the knower of the field.
Krishna	The eighth and principal avatar of Vishnu. He appears as a charioteer and advisor of Arjuna in the *Bhagavad-Gita*.
Kriya yoga	A yoga tradition that focuses on breath control for purifying the body's energy channels.
Kundalini	Primal energy that lies dormant at the base of the spine until it is activated
Kutir	Hut
Mantra	A sacred word, sound or verse that is chanted or sung as an incantation or prayer
Maya	The illusion of the partial reality of the physical world
Meditation	The process of increasing a conscious controlled focus of the mind characterised by expanded awareness.
Mithya	Identification with the relative reality of the material world. Described in the Indian textual lexicon as a state of forgetfulness:
Modern scientific approach	Based on observations and experiments
Mouni	One who has taken a vow of silence
Muladhara chakra	'Mula' means 'root' and 'adhara', foundation or base. At the base of the spine, this chakra forms the basic foundation for the seven chakras
Naga Sadhus	Traditionally these *sadhus* do not wear clothes (except

	perhaps a loin cloth), but cover themselves in ash. They commonly have dreadlocks and smoke gang (marijuana). Coloured marks on the forehead identify allegiance to a particular sec.
Namaskar	Traditional Indian greeting honouring the divine within
Nirvikalpa Samadhi	Meditative absorption in which the illusion of all the separate selves, of diversity, departs and the individual is no longer perceived to be separate from the One.
Nishkarma karma	Action without the sense of being the doer
Ontological truth	An accurate and adequate idea of existence as ultimate reality
Padma Shri Award	The fourth highest civilian award in India to recognize distinguished contribution in various spheres of activity
Pancha koshas	The five sheaths of the human being which potentially evolve towards higher levels of existence.
Paneer	Indian cheese
Patanjalis Yoga Sutras	196 aphorisms that summarize ancient practices in an organised and terse way, outlining the science of Self-realization through yoga.
Prakriti	The outer nature which can be perceived with the senses. The manifest universe-field, cosmos, creation, nature, matter
Prana	Life-force
Preyas	Enjoyment of the senses
Purusha	*The unmanifest energy which pervades the universe. The knower of the field, consciousness, supreme Self, God*
Raja yoga	A core focus on meditation, with other yoga practices supporting , namely: asana (postures), pranayama (breath control), yama (restraint), niyama (observances), pratyahara (sense withdrawal)
Renunciation	Relinquishing emotional attachment to worldly pleasure and replacing it with an attitude where the attention is turned to the transcendental aspect of life. On ordination as a monk, it

	signifies relinquishing money, wealth, titles and property.
Rishi	India's ancient sages of India who developed the conceptual ideas and practices that became Vedanta and the other philosophical systems. They were generally ascetics, who spent long years in meditation and tapasya (austerities).
Sadhana	Spiritual Practice
Sadhana	Spiritual Practice
Sadhu	Wandering holy men
Samadhi	Meditative absorption
Samkya yoga	One of the six orthodox philosophical systems of Hinduism that is more dualistic
Samsara	The indefinitely repeated cycle of birth, misery and death.
Sanatana Dharma	Eternal wisdom
Satsang	Translated as 'the company of the highest truth.' It is either spending time with a guru or an assembly of persons who listen to, talk about and assimilate the truth.
Savikalpa samadhi	Meditative absorption where the consciousness of duality and multiplicity still remain.
Scriptures	Ancient sacred writings
Self-enquiry	This commences with the practice of using the intellect to understand the Self. It probes the nature of the Self with questions such as 'Who Am I?' However, it is not merely an intellectual exercise; it facilitates true Knowing and clear awareness of the Self, by systematically exploring and setting aside false identities. It is based on direct experience.
Self-transcendence	The act or condition of going being beyond ego or egoity,
Shankacharya	A Vedic spiritual office, such as a pope or bishop in Christianity, chosen on the basis of spiritual accomplishments. There are four of these highly revered teachers who continue a 1200 year old tradition.
Spiritual lineages or traditions	Indian spirituality is characterised by a diversity of religion and practice, which have been passed down through the

	generations
Sreyas	Perfection
Sufism	The inner, mystical dimension of Islam
Swami	Master - signifying mastery over the smaller self and habit patterns, so that the eternal Self can shine through. It is an act of renunciation, generally into one of nine Hindu renunciate orders, and marks a setting aside of all worldly pursuits, so as to devote full-time effort to the direct experience of the Self, and to the service of others in the same endeavour.
Universal Self	The non-dual state of unity.
Upanishads	Foundation of Indian philosophical and psychological thought
Vasannas	Tendencies
Vedanta	Vedanta – literally, the end of Veda, is the culmination of Vedic thought and philosophy. It is the Vedic method of Self-Realization.
Vedas	The culmination of the Vedas – a collection of scriptures primarily focused on advaita (non-dualism)
Vrikshasana	Yoga Tree Pose
Western psychology	A multi-faceted psychological approach, largely based on empirical studies and widely used in psychological practices world-wide.
Yagna	Fire Ritual
Yatra	Spiritual pilgrimage
Yoga	Deriving from *Yug* meaning to yoke, yoga refers to the discipline of aligning the mind and body with spiritual goals.